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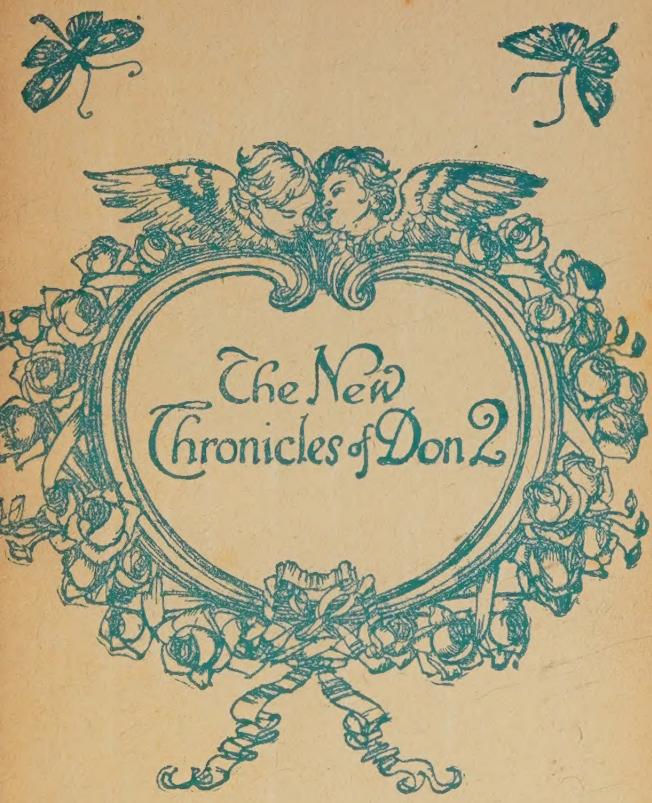
With success good wishes from L. H.


The New
Chronicles of Don 2

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K. & Hesketh Prichard

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THE NEW CHRONICLES OF DON Q.

CHAPTER I

HOW DON Q. CAME BACK

THOSE who read the last chronicles of Don Q. may remember that, after he defeated Don Hugo's long-planned expedition into the mountains, he disappeared. There were but three people in the world who believed that he still lived; one of these was far away in England, the two others, the hunter Robledo and his wife, dwelt for a time in the little white city under the foothills. At first, these two expected news of their master almost daily, but months, and even years, rolled by, and Don Q.'s fame was already passing into history in the sierra.

Now that he was gone the romantic heart of Spain forgot the darker shades of his character and remembered chiefly his virtues—the splendour of his generosities, his almost diabolic courage, his spirit of chivalry, and perhaps most of all, his unswerving fidelity to the poorest who served him. The people missed the glamour

of that mysterious life among the mountains, which was only enhanced by the flashlight illumination of his exploits. They continued to speculate curiously on those unspoken wrongs, which had driven him, a man of high birth and lineage, to the lawless shelter of the sierra; they loved to explain to strangers the reason of the name, Don Q., by which alone they knew him. It was not so much, they would say, that he possessed some facial resemblance to the *quebranta-huesos*, the bone-breaking vulture, but rather that his dealings with the world at large were marked by the same terrible finality which searched deep to the very marrow of being.

In the *ventas* and the little wayside wineshops, men's mouths were filled with his praise; one heard but laments for the lost friend of the poor —"*Ahi, Dios mio*, when the eagle was up above, there were no hawks, now there are many hawks and no eagle." This grew into a saying.

Amongst those hawks—certain petty robbers and thieves—at length arose one of large ambitions, who aspired to wear the mantle of Don Q. He named himself El Zurriago, *Anglicè*, the Whip, by which appellation this modern Jeroboam desired to announce to the countryside that his little finger would be thicker than his predecessor's loins. He kept his word, indeed, after his own reading of the matter, which,

however, differed vastly from the traditions of Don Q.

For El Zurriago, although he now and then made a prisoner of sufficient wealth or rank to be held to ransom, filled in most of his time with harrying the weak, the indigent, the already hungry. The February nights after his advent were lit with the flames of burning huts, or outlying dwellings of hill villages, where all were "poor to solemnity." In a word, El Zurriago and his wolf-pack ran amok through the land, for he was a man without bowels of mercy, who gave license to his followers to commit deeds which struck remonstrance cold.

Witness the story of the wife of Tomás, the charcoal burner—she who, with unhealed scars upon her face and unbalanced mind, still nursed the only one left alive to her of her brown, barefooted brood. And this under the same sky and on the same stage where legends lingered of Don Q.'s jealously guarded honour of reward and punishment, and his inviolable recognition of the claims of the poor.

Further, it was owned that more than one priest sighed as he toiled about his cliffside cure to think that the tolling of his bell would no more bring stragglers from the wild band in the Boca de Lobo—stricken into reverence by their soft-voiced, terrible captain—travelling down the

mountains to mass, or even to confession, for Don Q. was always a good Catholic.

Is it any wonder that in waste places the rare lights were covered while the night wind, laden with terror, howled at the doors? "El Zurriago is a man of dread," said the peasants who cling about those hills; "he walks in the darkness, he knocks with the naked knucklebone upon the door."

Now there was one person to whose heart these doings brought something very like despair, who argued to himself that if his master still lived such things could not continue. This was Robledo, once the most favoured follower of Don Q. After his marriage, the life of the city soon palled upon him, and he journeyed into the mid levels of the sierra with his wife, and there upon the south side of a group of granite boulders, amongst which thickets of elder and laurustinus thrust out ragged branches, he, being a skilled woodsman, built a dwelling. Over the lintel he carved a cross, and provided one or two simple necessaries to signify that here was a *posada*, an inn, where wayfarers could be provided with shelter, salt, and a glass of aguardiente.

It was a long, low, windowless place, with a bench by the wall inside the door, and opposite to it the small counter with its half-dozen glasses, backed by a recess where the wineskins bulged

dimly in the gloom. At one end of the house Isabellilla kept her cooking-pots, at the other, lost to sight, though not perhaps to the perception of other senses, lodged Robledo's mule. The means of entertainment were slight, yet parties of sportsmen, attracted by the fame of the hunter, came and slept uncomplainingly on the earthen floor, and were afterwards led to seek ibex by Robledo into the mountains he knew so well.

This move into the sierra had given a fresh lease of life to the expectation of Don Q.'s return, and, during their first bleak winter there, any sound of wind or falling stone would bring Robledo springing to the door, with the fierce, handsome face of his wife peering over his shoulder. Their hopes survived many disappointments, but not until the parody of El Zurriago's career had lasted for some time did despair lay his grip upon them.

Now about the period when this narrative opens, Robledo was expecting one of the occasional sportsmen who visited his inn. The matter had been arranged by letter, and to none had Robledo or his wife spoken of the matter; yet rumour carried to the ears of El Zurriago the fact that the *cazador* was expecting an English nobleman of fabulous fortune to hunt in the sierra.

Upon this, El Zurriago issued his commands to Robledo. The English lord was to be betrayed into the hands of the bandit, or the inn would be burnt to the ground and its inmates be given over to a fate of unqualified horror.

As dark fell, the door was closed and barred on the crying wind, and the couple in the lonely inn spoke at intervals of the evil fortune that threatened them. A rushlight lit up the shadows of the interior. Isabellilla was frying pancakes in the fat of a deer that her husband, who could not altogether keep to the paths of virtue, had poached from a distant preserve. The girl's hair was dressed becomingly as of old, her coarse yellow skirt did not hide the slender ankles formerly so much admired in the streets of Malaga, and except that perhaps her face was a little paler, her bust a little fuller, there was no change in her beauty. Now and then she would glance nervously back over her shoulder, and Robledo on the bench by the door sat brooding and dejected, listening to the wind which howled dry-eyed without.

A sudden stamp and a snort broke in upon the tension of the moment. Isabellilla whirled round, her eyes brilliant as ever and with the same smoulder of temper. Robledo, without changing his attitude, nodded slightly.

" It is but the mule, Leon," he muttered.

"An apoplexy take him! May he die on his head!" exclaimed the girl, lowering her voice, "and El Zurriago also! What answer did you send him?"

"None; it is wiser to be silent than to offend."

"You will not give this Englishman to him?"

The young man roused himself. "I have eaten my lord, Don Q.'s, salt. Shall I serve another?" he asked hotly.

"Hush, hush!" Isabellilla stood staring into the shadows. "The Englishman comes to-morrow, very soon El Zurriago will know—then what is to become of us? Saints in Paradise! these are hard times! It is in my heart, Robledo, that if you save this Englishman, we will die like scorched flies here in the mountains!"

Robledo lifted his head. "It may be, yet the Mother of Heaven forbid that I should die in a town!" he exclaimed with fervour.

The girl knelt down beside him, and slipped her arm across his shoulders.

"It is now two years since you were a brigand, beloved," she whispered in his ear, "and yet my lord keeps silence. Men say he is dead."

Robledo sighed heavily. "I have not believed it, for my lord promised he would return. I have waited—day by day I have said: 'To-day my lord will come, and throw the carcase of El Zurriago to the vultures!'" He broke off.

" Perhaps my lord journeys far away—perhaps to Cuba," suggested his wife.

" No, no! While my lord lived he heard everything, he knew everything. If he were yet alive would he not have heard long ago of El Zurriago? " His voice sank to a toneless whisper. " No, my lord is dead! "

His wife leaned closer. " Beware," she whispered, " one moves round the house."

Robledo snatched up his gun, Isabellilla covered the rushlight. She had not been Robledo's wife so long without learning that the man who enters a room lit only by the glow of red-hot charcoal is at a disadvantage as compared with one already within. These two lived with perceptions that their mode of life had strung to perpetual alarm.

A sharp rattle drummed on the door. The man and woman stood hushed and tense, listening in the gloom. Was it a scurry of pebbles blast-driven, or stones thrown by a human hand?

" None pass at this hour," she muttered, " Blessed be Heaven you carved a cross on the lintel! "

Robledo shook off her grasp, and flung open the door on a night of storm and stars. " Who is there? Come in, or I fire."

A sound of squeaking leather answered him as of a man dismounting from the saddle.

"*Ahi, Dios mio!*" moaned the woman, "it is the civile." (The Civil Guard, who are the terror of evildoers, but the succour of any in peril or distress throughout the land of Spain.)

"Are you not the *cazador* Robledo?" asked a quiet voice in halting Spanish from the night outside. "I am Lord Guy Barwood; do you not expect me?"

Robledo ran out. "A thousand pardons, excellency, we did not expect you until to-morrow; a thousand pardons, but these are wild times up here in the sierra. I am, indeed, Robledo the *cazador*, and this is my poor house. It and all within it are at your service. Enter, I pray you, and I will stable your horse."

The stranger entered, pulling open his fur coat to get at his pince-nez, which he set on the bony ridge of his nose to look round the house.

"Is there not a fire, *patróna?*" he said in the same cold voice and diffident Spanish.

Isabellilla hastened to lay together some pieces of wood, apologising as she did so for the smoke. But she was not too busy to inspect the sportsman. Her survey satisfied her, for he looked rich indeed, from the beauty of his furs to the fine leather of his leggings and the solidity of his unmistakably English boots. Isabellilla had become something of a connoisseur in sportsmen.

Lord Guy sat down on the bench, and taking off his cap, passed his hand slowly over his thick dark hair and beard, but he did not speak until Robledo led a mule into the doorway.

"You are alone, excellency?" the mountaineer said with much surprise.

Lord Guy put on his glasses again. "They told me in the plains that a mule was safer than a horse in the sierra." He seemed to find his words with difficulty. "And two Guardias Civilies escorted me to the wood in the valley, and put me on this path. My—my—baggage comes to-morrow."

In silence Robledo stabled the mule at a safe distance from his own, in silence his wife prepared the best fare she had in the house. Their guest ate sparingly, and also in silence, but when the last olive stone dropped upon his plate, he lit his curved pipe and turned to Robledo.

"Now of the ibex," he said. "Shall I have good sport?"

Robledo stood before him. "There is no longer any sport in the sierra, excellency," he said fiercely.

"What do you mean?"

Isabellilla wrung her hands and struck her bosom. "It is not his fault, excellency."

But the Englishman was still looking sternly at Robledo. "Speak!" he ordered. "Explain!"

"There is danger in the mountains for travellers," repeated the *cazador*, "danger that lies in wait up above there."

"Do you mean brigands—are they not always in your sierra! I have heard of some Don Z. or Don. Q."

Isabellilla brought her palms sharply together. "Alas! excellency, Don Q. is dead!"

Lord Guy appeared rather taken aback. "Do you, then, regret him!"

Robledo and his wife looked at one another. This would certainly be an awkward admission to make. Then Robledo spoke.

"Had your excellency been fortunate enough to have been entertained by Don Q., that would have been an honour, believe me. For Don Q. was the friend of princes. But this El Zurriago, although he boasts of himself, is but a vile dog of the gutter, one who would eat offal in the streets"; and he spat forcibly into the flames.

"All brigands are alike," commented Lord Guy, scornfully.

"Pardon, excellency!" exclaimed Robledo, affronted, "you did not know Don Q."

"Did *you?*" demanded the Englishman, grimly.

Robledo hesitated. "My papers are all in order, excellency. Have not many at the foothills told you that I am an honest man, and

that none meet with—trouble who go with me into the mountains ? "

" Yes, I have heard this is so ; therefore I shall certainly hunt ibex to-morrow," was the answer.

" You will of a surety fall into the hands of El Zurriago. He may shoot me, but I cannot save you. Thus you will be shamed, for El Zurriago is not a true *sequestrador* who holds to ransom, but a mean and vile thief who has sought refuge in the sierra. Afterwards he will come down and burn my *posada* and my wife in it," said Robledo. " Turn back, excellency, I beseech you ! "

" I never turn back," said Lord Guy in his cold, indifferent voice.

Silence dropped on the little group. Without the wind tore at the walls, and to the hunter and his wife a sense of loneliness and impending doom seemed to creep in with its moaning.

" Then we perish," said Robledo at last very quietly. Isabellilla turned away and covered her face with her hands.

Lord Guy rose. " It is time to sleep. Give me a glass of aguardiente, *patrón ;* " he followed Robledo to the counter ; " also a second glass for the *patróna,* and a third for yourself. Now, let us drink to the old days, my children ! " he added in a changed voice, which caused Isabellilla to whip round with a scream.

The figure was indeed that of Lord Guy, but his pince-nez dangled uselessly across his breast, his wig and whiskers lay on the counter, and it was Don Q.'s bald head and well-known face that bowed in grave courtesy before her.

"My lord has come to save us," she sobbed.

Robledo was at his master's feet. "This El Zurriago, lord—" he began.

"Yes, yes, I heard of him in England," said Don Q., "and also they told me much in the plains."

"My lord will kill him!" exclaimed the young mountaineer, leaping up eagerly. "I know where Gaspár lives—in Barcelona—Pablo, Estaban. In a week I can gather forty of my old comrades, and my lord will lead them into the sierra—"

Don Q.'s geniality disappeared. "Have I asked for suggestions?" he inquired harshly.

Robledo hung his head.

"Your tongue has grown loose during my absence, Robledo," went on Don Q. "It is a fault you must hasten to correct. To-morrow at daybreak you and the English sportsman, Lord Guy Barwood, will start to shoot ibex in the high gorges."

He spoke no further word that night.

CHAPTER II

HOW DON Q. CAME BACK—(*continued*)

It was yet black dark and very cold when Isabellilla, hooded in her shawl, brewed steaming chocolate, such as men drink in the hill villages, for Don Q. and her husband Later she watched them vanish into the gloom that yet hung about the valley. Lord Guy rode ahead, his rifle slung behind his saddle, while Robledo followed on foot, leading his own mule, laden with bedding, food, cooking pots, and his employer's valise. The stars were now hidden, and as they rode the ink-black night turned ashen, hardened into bleak stencillings, and then the light of dawn filtered through the air like milk through a cup of tea. The sun rose with a chilly shower.

By vague bridle-paths the *cazador* and the pretended Lord Guy travelled upon their way, hardly exchanging a word as they mounted from one sombre defile to another. A forsaken land this, with not a hut to break its solitude; the sole reminder that man had ever trod those lonely trails were the ghastly tokens set up to show that here or there one had been done to death by violence, and to implore passers-by to remember in their prayers the shuddering souls hurried unshriven into eternity.

Clouds drew up to the zenith, and the sierra put on its most forbidding aspect, and for the first time in his life Robledo felt the menace of their enfolding. Even his seasoned courage was shaken as the grey shoulders of the hills closed in behind them, for he had expected a rendezvous with his old comrades of the Boca de Lobo. But as they entered one sinister ravine after another his hope failed, and some shadow of Don Q.'s plan came to his apprehension.

Knowing as he did the almost fiendish intrepidity of his master, he yet found it difficult to believe that Don Q. actually intended facing El Zurriago practically single-handed, even perhaps allowing himself to be made prisoner. A premonition of evil weighed upon the young mountaineer until the frail figure ahead chanced to turn, and Robledo saw the angled face eye-bright with anticipation of conflict.

So evening drew on, and in the mouth of a snow-streaked valley, Robledo pitched camp under the lee of a clump of firs. Now it is hard to know what Don Q. might have done had the development for which he waited been delayed. But it came that same evening. The raven and his mate, first of birds to foretell the night, were already flapping to their roost in some mist-hidden cliff, when a bullet sang mournfully over the camp fire, and a voice cried out to the Englishman to surrender.

Lord Guy arranged his pince-nez with deliberation, and surveyed the seven or eight men bound about the head and middle with garish colours, who gradually drew within the circle of the firelight.

It is quite unnecessary to tell of the fight which followed. Don Q. was of all men the last to omit observance of any detail likely to lend credibility to the *rôle* he chose to sustain. In this case it is probable that, unless he desired it, he would never have been taken at all. But when he had, with Robledo's help, thinned the eight brigands down to five, he surrendered with all dignity and some of the honours of war.

"You vermin will be wise not to interfere too greatly with me," he said imperiously; "I will accompany you. That is sufficient."

He, however, submitted to be bound upon his mule, and as it was led further and further into the remoter gorges, he gave way to a train of thought, to which he mentally acknowledged circumstances had hitherto forced him to remain a complete stranger. In short, he was, for the first time in his life, a prisoner, and, as he was borne on towards the brigands' camp, he endeavoured with some success to analyse the hopes and fears proper to a man in so perilous a position. He found this occupation more engrossing than he had imagined possible, and

the line of thought led him so far afield that he was surprised, and almost disagreeably brought to earth again, when the party, rounding a shoulder of rock, saw below them the camp of El Zurriago.

Upon the cliff-bound slope great fires burned, round which wild men, shaggy with their life among the mountains, were squatting. In the gloom, above their heads, the flames made gnomes of out-jutting crags and stumps, and gleamed upon the outer surfaces of a black couchant boulder, against which stood out in relief a rough shelter of canvas, closed to the public eye by a curtain of stained and ragged red.

Don Q. was scandalised when instead of the orderly and ceremonious advent formerly accorded to his own captives, a score of men leaped from the fires, and ran to meet him with uncouth cries and jeers. They pulled and pushed the mule on which he was riding as they hurried it down to the camp, where twenty hands unbound Lord Guy's ankles and set him on his feet.

A sound like a pistol shot echoed at the same moment round the cliffs, and Lord Guy perceived a burly fellow seated on an overturned barrel where the full play of the pine-fed fire beat upon him. He held a whip in his hand, and as he cracked it the men rose up and herded together behind the prisoner. Some act of brutality seemed imminent. El Zurriago's evil reputation,

entirely justified by his aspect, promised as much. Robledo shivered with fury as he beheld his lord standing thus exposed to the chance of insult.

But Lord Guy lost no time. He bowed ceremoniously, as a man bows to his equal, and with a suavity that made amends for his broken Spanish, he said :

" I am Lord Guy Barwood from England. I beg to introduce myself, señor, for I perceive that you are the captain here."

El Zurriago eyed his captive. His vicious glance betrayed perplexity.

" Ah, so you perceive who I am ? " he sneered. " I am the Whip, the Scourge of the sierra."

Lord Guy bowed again. " I have heard of you," he said, and his complimentary tone implied that the things told him were of a pleasant nature.

El Zurriago considered this sulkily, biting at the handle of his whip meanwhile.

" Have you heard what happens to my prisoners ? " he inquired presently with a twisted grin.

" I presume it is necessary for them to find a ransom."

" Not so easy as that, you English pig ! I will teach you very soon. Here, comrades, take this man and tie him to a tree, and I will flog the skin from his back ! "

To his surprise, the captive listened unmoved.

"You do not understand me," he shouted, "or you would grovel for mercy. I will flay you alive!—do you understand now?" He looked again for a change in the prisoner's indifference, but could discern none. He repeated his threats in a bellow, and added: "Are you dumb—have you nothing to say?"

Lord Guy shrugged his shoulders. "Merely that I find I have made a very grave mistake," he replied; but he had exchanged his former graciousness for a freezing and distant manner.

El Zurriago laughed angrily. "You imagined that a ransom—"

"More than that," interrupted Lord Guy. "I heard of a brigand in the sierra, who was a man of birth and breeding, one with whom a gentleman might agreeably keep company, and, at the first glance, I believed this to be true—of you."

El Zurriago stood quite still, amazed, pondering on this reluctant but flattering admission. The idea bit deep—this English lord had taken him, El Zurriago, for a man of birth! Here was a touch upon his weak point, the chief weakness of the true malcontent.

"Take him away," he ordered gruffly. "Lodge him in my tent."

"I cannot escape from you, therefore I request

you will permit my *cazador* to unbind me," said the prisoner. "No, no, I will not be handled again by your mountain cats, who smell intolerably of garlic."

"I will unbind you myself." El Zurriago approached.

Lord Guy gave him a quick look. "I should certainly prefer it."

"Señor," whispered the bandit as he fingered the knots, "you have divined the truth. You will find that I am surely a person of the noblest birth, of the most superb breeding. But before these animals, you understand, I must play a part."

CHAPTER III

HOW DON Q. CAME BACK—(*continued*)

FROM that hour began a veritable "Comedy of Errors." Like a bird in spring, El Zurriago assumed his finest feathers to consolidate the good opinion of Lord Guy. He recalled all that he had ever heard of Don Q., and endeavoured to mould himself upon that once famous type, little guessing under whose eyes he essayed the part.

After Robledo had been despatched to the city with the demand for the Englishman's ransom, the time passed slowly, and every day

saw the same routine enacted. El Zurriago set himself to entertain his prisoner, and in the evenings across a bottle of wine, often of so indifferent a quality that to swallow it needed all the courtesy of Lord Guy (or shall we say of Don Q. ?), the bandit rambled on of himself and his deeds, while the slender figure opposite sat listening wrapped in a mantle of polite silence. Many things did El Zurriago tell, and all of them tended to his own aggrandisement, the unalterable reserve of his captive only driving him to redouble his boastings.

It must be owned that Lord Guy found all his nerves grow daily more irritated, and more antagonistic to his captor. Though the words, hidalgo, caballero, were seldom off his lips, the man's habits, his very personality, awoke in his prisoner sensations of almost physical nausea. For instance, El Zurriago could not keep his distance, he must always finger and touch those with whom he spoke, while he thrust his face into that of his interlocutor. Indeed, he had long ago palled upon Don Q., who could overlook much because he understood much of humanity, but who found this loud-patterned bandit insufferable. "The creature during his unbridled career in the sierra," he wrote later in his autobiography, "had merged into the sub-human, the monstrous. He bragged of his brutalities to

the poverty-stricken, which, alas ! were true ; of his amours, grotesquely apocryphal ! among the noble names of Spain—of his bad faith to all."

At an early period of his captivity the prisoner made a suggestion, with which El Zurriago fell in ; this was that a palisade of reeds or brush-wood should be erected in front of the tent in which they took their meals, in order to supply two needs. The one being to insure greater privacy, the other to keep off the wind, which at that season blows cold. So it was done, and thenceforward Lord Guy and his captor dined in aristocratic seclusion, but always within earshot of the band where they lay around their fires.

Exactly how much longer this state of affairs could have continued it is not in the historian's power to tell ; but on the evening of Robledo's return with the ransom-money, a conversation arose which hurried events to their conclusion.

Up to that date the name of Don Q. had never once been spoken by El Zurriago ; although Lord Guy sat waiting for it every night, the egotism of his companion kept that one subject jealously excluded. The itinerant talk had droned along well into the night, its burden being, as usual, the past love-affairs, the present exploits of the speaker.

" I shall miss these pleasant conversations

when I go down into the plains to-morrow," observed Lord Guy, suddenly.

El Zurriago started from the rapture of his vauntings, and dropped back into reality. He was peculiarly annoyed at the interruption, which cut short a tale of intrigue with a duchess.

"To-morrow?" he said scowling. "Why should you go to-morrow?"

"My ransom has arrived, what is there to detain me?"

El Zurriago leaned forward. "This, that it s not my will to let you go. You will die to-morrow. I have promised my men that they shall see an amusing death."

"But surely you will not break your word, I believed you to be a person of honour, señor."

El Zurriago laughed derisively. "I am not Don Q.," he said. "I obtain my ransom, but I allow nothing to rob me of the sport of watching my prisoner die! You have perhaps heard of Don Q.?"

"Assuredly," replied Lord Guy, "I was well acquainted with one of his captives, a certain Sir Graham Marks, who, at his house in England, often tells an anecdote over the wine of the days he spent in these very mountains with a great brigand. What has become of him?"

That Lord Guy should remain unmoved even under sentence of death did not astonish El

Zurriago, who by this time had come to expect almost anything from his imperturbability. But words in praise of Don Q. galled.

"Don Q. is dead," he answered roughly.

"I have gathered that he was not unpopular among the strange people who inhabit your mountains," observed the Englishman.

El Zurriago tossed his head and made a gesture of contempt. "It may be so, for, see you, he was one of themselves, of vulgar birth."

Lord Guy started, but controlled himself. "Can this be true?"

"I can swear to it. Besides, he was easy to deal with. But to be a brigand of note a number of very great qualities are required. These he did not possess. A fine presence, for example." El Zurriago tapped himself on the breast. "Look upon me! Whereas he was but a meagre, sickly fellow, not five feet high."

"I have always been told that his height was exactly five feet five and a half inches!" exclaimed Lord Guy with unwonted sharpness, "and that he looked even taller by reason of the air with which he carried himself."

El Zurriago laughed irritably. "They told you wrong. I say that he was not five feet high; moreover, he did not appear to be even of that height, he appeared a dwarf. And I should know," he ended with meaning.

" What ? You were acquainted with him ? "

" Intimately. He implored me again and again to take over the leadership of his band. He desired to serve as lieutenant under me."

A close observer might have noticed Lord Guy's hand open and close firmly as though he were crushing something.

" Why did you not accept this obliging offer ? "

" Because his men were completely out of hand. He was not a disciplinarian, you understand. He was a coward at heart, and would have shielded himself behind me."

" Some say that Don Q. is not dead. He may return," suggested Lord Guy.

" He will never return ! " cried the other.

" How can you be sure ? How can you know that he is dead ? "

El Zurriago hitched his packing-case nearer, and thrust his face into Lord Guy's. " I say that he *is* dead. And, look you, señor, I should know, for it was I who killed him ! "

There could be no doubt about it now, Lord Guy was distinctly moved.

" You killed him ? How interesting ! I trust he made a good end ? "

" No, no ! He screamed for mercy. It was indeed droll ! It was incredible ! "

" Incredible ? There can be no doubt of

that ! " Lord Guy dropped his voice, and muttered, " Five feet high—a dwarf ! "

El Zurriago caught the words. Pushing back his seat, he nodded. " Yes, five feet high. What could you expect from such a man ? "

" This," with the word Lord Guy sprang on him across the table. He had no knife, but he caught up the bottle from which they had been drinking wine, and struck the bandit full on the temple. " You, a brigand—you, a *sequestrador !* " he hissed as he struck again, " you, who are but a cat of Madrid ! a plucked fowl ! " For a fraction of a second El Zurriago's eyes stared and then contracted as he fell forward, striking his forehead upon the table.

With the extraordinary quickness that characterised his moments of action, Don Q. bound his opponent's hands and feet, and with the whip prepared an entirely efficacious form of gag. Next, after carefully removing his own false beard and wig, he found a cloak and sombrero, which he put on with care and accurate attention to effect. Then with the other man's weapons in his belt, he sat down beside the table, and clapped his hands with a resonant force.

A long silence followed. El Zurriago's men were not accustomed to be summoned by that method, which in truth savoured too much of the difference of class and would have been

resented as such by the band. But Robledo, playing cards by the fire, heard and turned his head to listen with so violent a movement that the cards doubled and broke in his clenched fist.

After an interval the sound came again. He leaped up.

"It is my lord. I must go to him!" he cried, but half-a-dozen men flung themselves upon him. For a moment he struggled desperately, but numbers were too strong for him. "Come, then, to the tent of your *capitan*. Has *he* ever called you like this? Hark!" he said.

The men looked at one another. "No, he is not a hidalgo that we should be as his servants. He dare not clap his hands to call us."

"Then who claps? Come and see."

Not a man remained at the fires—a long straggling line wound round the end of the palisade and massed before the tent door. The curtains were thrown back, and within lay their *capitan* upon the ground, while at the table sat a silent, sinister figure, such as most among them had met with terror in their dreams. They stood huddled together open-mouthed. From within El Zurriago, who had recovered consciousness, stared at them with fury and appeal in his eyes. But none heeded him.

At length Robledo's excitement burst out in words.

"My lord, Don Q., has returned to the sierra. Viva! Viva!"

An odd noise like a gasp went up from the crowd.

"I am of a truth Don Q.," said the sibilant voice softly, "and you have all of you heard of me from your cradles. Is not that so?"

A quick assent broke from the listeners.

"I give you your choice. Here is your captain. Choose now between him and me."

A hubbub of noise and cheering called out the echoes, and in it El Zurriago heard the warning of a speedy death. When the agitation had died down, Don Q. spoke again.

"Robledo, you will divide among these bandits a sixth of the ransom you have brought into the sierra for Lord Guy Barwood. Go, my children."

"It is of a truth Don Q., for so did he always call his followers," remarked one fellow as they withdrew.

Then Don Q. took the whip from the mouth of El Zurriago.

"You have heard," he asked. "I am he who has none of the qualities of a great brigand! I am he who is not five feet high!" he added furiously, for this indeed was the unforgivable insult which wounded the diseased vanity that had its root set deep among the contradictory foundations of his strange character.

"Kill me swiftly," was El Zurriago's reply.

In the early sunshine the man was taken and bound upon the back of Robledo's old mule, and several of the robbers crowded round and forced the animal to the edge of the precipice.

"Shall we prick him with our knives and send him over?" inquired one eager renegade of his new master.

"For the mule's sake, you will do nothing of the kind," said Don Q. "Here, Robledo, take this man down the mountains until you sight the Guardia Civile; then tie this label upon him, and drive the mule downwards."

Some hours later two Civiles came upon a browsing mule, upon whose back sat bound a man who bore this label across his breast:

"El Zurriago,
passenger to any prison in my
Beloved Spain.
(signed) Don Q."

CHAPTER IV

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH A FAMOUS CRICKETER

THE first prisoners taken by Don Q. after his return were two Englishmen, named Rimbolt and Essenden. It was to the enterprise of

Robledo that he owed them, and we must take up their story on the evening of their capture.

"I don't agree with you, Rimbolt. The thing is our own fault. We had our warning, and we disregarded it. Consequently we are here," said Essenden.

Rimbolt grunted irritably as he shifted his weight from one shoulder to another, where he lay propped, hands and feet tied, against the wattled side of the *choza*.

"If you had only taken my advice when those fellows began to close in on us—well, it is too late to talk of that now," he grumbled. "Here we are in this beastly hencoop, and likely to be kept here goodness knows how long! We are helpless, yet it is certain from all I have heard of Don Q., a more infamous coward does not breathe in Spain."

"Oh, go slow," said Essenden. "His worst enemies—and he has an army of them—do not deny him the quality of courage. I rather look forward to seeing him."

Rimbolt jerked out an impatient word. "All your life, my good Essenden, you have been an idealist. Even when we were at Charterhouse you used to take things in this easy way. It looks like a fine fortitude, but it is in reality a form of self-indulgence—you don't wish to recognise the disagreeable element that is mixed

up with all that one does or experiences. You should be harder with yourself."

"Recognising the disagreeables won't mend our case, I'm afraid," suggested Essenden, good-humouredly.

"Perhaps not, but it is better to face facts," persisted the other. "You talk of wanting to see Don Q. I suppose you have forgotten what that meeting is going to cost us. Certainly a great deal more money than I, for my part, can afford."

"Very likely. Therefore I say my point of view is the more reasonable. Since we are going to pay a big price, let us enjoy ourselves, and get as much of a run as we can for our money." Essenden laughed as he tried to stretch his cramped limbs.

"We shan't think it much of a run when this brute sends the lobes of our ears down to Ingram at the Consulate to hurry him up with the ransom," objected Rimbolt.

"Let us hope it won't come to that. This guide, Robledo, tells me that Don Q. is a very courtly—"

"Oh, if you are going to listen to the charming Robledo, who has betrayed us into our present disgusting position, I have no more to say!" And Rimbolt turned away his face and shut his eyes determinately.

"I grant you Robledo may be a ruffian, but he's all the more likely to be able to speak from knowledge of Don Q."

A short silence followed, but Rimbolt could not for long bottle up his annoyance. "It is a national disgrace that these nests of robbers should be allowed to exist," he began again. "Wait till I get back to the coast and out of this infernal sierra, and I will raise such a hue and cry that the Government will be forced to sweep the country clear of such pests! I hope to see our friend Robledo garrotted yet!"

He waited for a reply, but Essenden made none, and presently he resumed. "There is one thing I do ask of you, Essenden, and that is to leave me to bargain with this brigand. I know how fatally offhand you are in your dealings, but I expect by a little judicious management to get off cheaper than you expect."

"All right. I'll only put my oar in if things get hot." Essenden smiled in the dusk. He could picture Hammond Rimbolt's notion of tact!

"Yes, better keep quiet, my boy, or you won't be back to play the Australians this season," returned Rimbolt, solemnly. "If it was a matter of cricket, I should be the first to ask your opinion, but in the realities of life you must allow me to consult my own."

It was a queer-grained friendship, if friendship it could be called that was rather long acquaintance and association. Habit more than actual liking formed its foundation. Certain it is many people wondered why Essenden "put up with" Hammond Rimbolt. One taste, however, was common to both men—a love of cricket, and this created a bond between them; but while Essenden was a great bat with a world-wide reputation, Rimbolt was no more than a respectable player.

Summer was beginning to make itself felt even in the high passes, and the wind usually so cold and pure carried now the scent of herb and drowsy flower. The two Englishmen had undertaken a short walking tour in the sierra, and fell among thieves by the way. During a midday siesta they were set on and over-powered by several picturesque but distinctly dirty mountaineers. At night, after having marched a long distance, they were cast into a bottle-shaped hut of reeds to await the orders of Don Q. The sun had risen, and was drawing out the strong resinous odour of the fallen pine-needles, when Robledo put his head into the *choza*.

"The command has come, excellencies. We are to be taken to the Boca de Lobo."

"What for?" asked Rimbolt, indignantly.

"*Quien sabe, señor?*" replied Robledo; and

not all Rimbolt's questions could get any other answer from him.

The Boca de Lobo was looking its best when the Englishmen, emerging from the tunnel of rock that led to it, passed again into the grateful warmth of mountain sunshine. A number of men, mostly leather-clad, with waistbands of scarlet cloth, were lounging near the fires. Far up the surrounding cliffs flowers bloomed along the ledges where the sun touched them during some hour of his daily round. Against the sky at the other end of the gorge a string of wind-blown pines stood aslant, whispering to a breeze that scarcely moved their branches.

Essenden looked round with some curiosity, and remarked on the notable absence of litter.

"It is like a stage-scene—got up for our benefit, I suppose"—it was never an easy matter to escape Rimbolt's disdain—"Tree could do it much better at His Majesty's."

"Come along. They say Don Q. is waiting for us."

"Take your time, Essenden. It will do him good to wait. He must be made to understand we do not belong to the common run of captives."

As they advanced along the terrace that led to the mouth of the cave, Don Q. rose and saluted them in his usual punctilious manner. Essenden took off his hat in return, but Rimbolt

only nodded. He was the kind of Briton who believes in the power of impoliteness.

Don Q. resumed his seat and eyed the two men as they stood side by side.

"May I inquire your names, señores?"

"My name is Rimbolt—Hammond Rimbolt. I daresay you have heard of me."

The brigand in his coldest tones expressed himself desolated to confess that he never had.

"That's a pity; but you may as well know that I am a man about whose detention a good deal of noise is likely to be made, for I am the private secretary of Lord Flitterby, the coming Prime Minister of Great Britain."

"During my stay in Great Britain I have heard of Lord Flitterby," replied Don Q. "Let us hope that he values his private secretary, and is prepared to make some sacrifice to regain him."

"You mean in the way of ransom? Under the circumstances we shall no doubt be forced to pay you something. Well, how soon can we get away to Malaga, or to the coast?" demanded Rimbolt, briskly.

Don Q. lit a fresh cigarette before he answered. "You go a little too fast. For example, I have not yet heard the name of your friend. May I ask—" he looked at Essenden.

"I am Egbert Essenden, señor," said the young man.

Don Q. put a slender finger to his forehead reflectively. "I seem to know that name."

"I am afraid I cannot claim to be anybody in particular," admitted its owner.

"Nonsense! Do let me manage the affair!" interrupted Rimbolt. "You're only making yourself cheap. I want to frighten the fellow into releasing us."

Don Q. began to speak, but Rimbolt overbore him.

"Egbert Essenden is a very great cricketer, and has played for England," adding in an aside, "not that he'll know much about that."

To their astonishment, the brigand's face cleared, and a light of real interest came into it. "My good fortune overwhelms me!" he exclaimed. "I have long desired to converse upon the game of cricket with one who entirely understands its intricacies. I now know why your name seemed familiar. Are you not the famous 'Double E.'?"

Rimbolt raised his eyebrows. "That is his nickname on the cricket-field," he said. "How do you come to know it?"

"I have of late spent some time in England," explained Don Q., "and I possess many English friends. I am not so ignorant of your national games as you might suppose. In fact, I made

a point of watching one or two cricket matches in your country."

"You can talk of all that another time," put in Rimbolt. "Just now we want to hear how much money you intend to ask for by way of ransom."

Don Q. clapped his hands. "Gaspár, you will bring a chair beside mine for the tall señor, and conduct the lesser one to the end of the terrace out of earshot. This will afford you leisure, señor Rimbolt, to ponder on the subject of your ransom until I am prepared to discuss the matter with you. Now, Don Double E., we will for a moment interest ourselves in cricket."

"What did you think of it as a game?" asked Essenden, falling in with his humour. "Did you see any good matches?"

"I have reason to believe so, señor. For instance, I was passing one day through a hamlet, when I perceived a number of men in coats of bright colours issuing from an inn. I followed them to one of your beautiful village greens, where I took my seat on a bench placed under trees upon the side of the grass, and from there gained a little insight into your national pastime."

"Pray tell me what happened," said Essenden, sure that the brigand's view would be, at anyrate, novel.

"For a considerable time several men—I

counted fifteen—performed the complicated evolutions necessary to the game. My sympathies were naturally with the persons who wielded the bat, seeing that each stood single-handed against so many opponents." Don Q. looked questioningly at the cricketer.

"It may look rather one-sided, señor," replied Essenden, with gravity, "but I can assure you the batsman very often has the best of it."

"I must confess that appearances led me to conclude otherwise. A gentleman, who had been batting for several minutes, when struck upon the leg by the ball, suddenly walked away from the game, and perceiving my bench to be somewhat isolated, hastened to throw himself upon it at my side. He was evidently in a state of the deepest chagrin. 'I never heard of such a decision!' he exclaimed. I replied sympathetically, and begged him to inform me of the particulars. 'Why, the ball did not pitch in the parish!' he said, 'I have been swindled out!' I inquired who had swindled him. He stared at me. 'That umpire,' he replied, indicating a strong and determined-looking person in a white coat. 'Since that is so, you must at once seek redress,' I said, and rose to assist him. 'What d'ye mean?' he cried. 'This,' I answered, 'if you have been overreached or victimised by the person in the white coat, I will aid you in forcing

him to give you redress,' and I grasped my swordstick and prepared to accompany him." Don Q. paused.

"And what followed then?" Essenden allowed no symptom of his inward amusement to appear.

"Would you believe it, señor, he immediately began to mumble excuses for the man in fault, and after edging further and further away from me along the bench, he rose, and fled at full speed towards the tent in which his comrades were ensconced."

Essenden contrived to throw into his face the look of shocked surprise which Don Q. obviously expected.

"I have often revolved this episode in my mind, señor," he resumed, "but never yet have I comprehended it. And I may admit I have occasionally regretted that I did not follow that personage to demand an explanation of his churlish behaviour. I conclude that in spite of his *comme-il-faut* exterior, he must have been a man of no breeding."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Essenden; "I've occasionally seen something of the sort myself."

The brigand pondered this reply before he spoke. "Then we must regard it as an eccentricity merely," he said. "Now we will recall your friend, and descend for a short time to the coarse details of business. It is fortunate, señor,"

he added to Rimbolt when he rejoined them, "that you mentioned the fact of Don Double E.'s fame as a cricketer at a critical moment."

Rimbolt nodded complacently at Essenden, he felt he was carrying the affair through with credit. "How so?" he inquired.

"I was about to assess your ransoms at £1000 each."

"Ah, indeed? And now you have thought better of it!"

"But certainly, señor! They will now be double that amount; in fact, £2000 each—£4000 in all."

Rimbolt flushed angrily. "I fear you had better reconsider that decision. You will be lucky to get half the amount."

"Speak for yourself, señor," said Don Q. with increasing coldness, "for I am aware I have a treasure in Don Double E. All England would subscribe, if needful, to rescue their favourite."

"From what? Do you dare to threaten us?" Rimbolt completely lost his temper under the blow to his self-satisfaction. "Suppose we do not choose to pay any ransom—what then?"

Don Q. waved his hand. "We will not dwell upon such dismal anticipations," he said. "Send your demand down the mountains, and until the answer arrives you will remain as my guests."

"This is absurd! Suppose our ransoms fail to arrive? How long are we to remain as—your guests?"

"You forget, señor," Don Q. replied with bleak indifference, "I have the exigencies of my position to consider. If so deplorable a situation should arise, you will indeed remain—not as my guests—but as the guests of the sierra for ever!"

A long, strained silence followed, until Don Q. left them to prepare their letters. "I was going to suggest," said Rimbolt at last, "that I should write to Ingram. My name may have some influence with him, though this boor knows nothing of it."

"All right," agreed Essenden, "and you can inclose my letter to my bankers. They will have to bustle a bit to send £2000 for me, I can tell you."

CHAPTER V

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH A FAMOUS CRICKETER—(*continued*)

AFTER the packet had been despatched down the mountains by the hand of Robledo, the reader must imagine the quiet passing of the days. Although Rimbolt grumbled incessantly,

this period was a much pleasanter experience than either of the captives had expected. They were permitted on parole to wander as they liked about the inclosed glen of the Boca de Lobo, and, indeed, became to all intents and purposes the guests of Don Q.

To use Essenden's words, Don Q. "did them very well." They drank excellent wine, and throve on the fare provided for them. They solaced the hours of detention with tobacco. They played cards, notably picquet, and discovered that at that game the brigand had few equals. They expounded to their host something of the science of bridge, and occasionally, late in the night, the stakes rose high, for Rimbolt, who had an opinion of his own play, conceived the project of winning back a sum equivalent to his ransom from his pale antagonist. He was not successful, for, as he ever afterwards complained, the cards lay always against him.

As day joined day in the bosom of Buddha, Essenden found favour with Don Q., while Rimbolt as surely fell from grace. Although it was often possible to discern the sadder self below, Essenden made a pleasant companion, whose fundamental reserve of character was discounted by his readiness to be entertained or to entertain. Whereas Rimbolt was a man of moods, a good deal occupied with himself and

his own feelings. He imagined he was conferring a favour upon the brigand by accepting his hospitality, thus his early grumblings grew into impertinences, and these in turn into manifest affronts as he became emboldened by Don Q.'s impassive politeness. But Essenden, the on-looker, more than once caught the glance with which the brigand followed Rimbolt, and at length he made up his mind to break silence and to warn his companion.

"By the way, don't you think it would pay to be a little more civil to our host?" he said.

Rimbolt regarded him from under a disdainful eyebrow. "I am not in the habit of truckling."

"You may offend him mortally, and he has it in his power to make things very awkward for us."

"Does it look like it?" sneered the other. "He knows where his best interest lies. I could kick him out of his own cave,and he would probably take off his hat and beg my pardon."

"I wouldn't try it," said Essenden, rather drily. "I can only repeat that I believe your attitude is unwise."

"And I beg to differ with you," retorted Rimbolt. "You will find before we leave this infernal sierra that my method of making the man respect me will prove invaluable. I believe he already regrets having laid hands on me.

May I add, Essenden, that I do not appreciate interference."

"Oh, all right," returned Essenden, good-temperedly.

And so the subject dropped, with the result that Don Q. addressed more and more of his conversation to Essenden, omitting Rimbolt excepting in so far as his duty as host demanded. But Rimbolt had no hesitation about obtruding his opinions, and these not infrequently were expressed in a manner likely to be more then unpalatable to Don Q. Once or twice it happened that the brigand was on the point of replying, but Essenden always threw himself conversationally into the breach, and open war remained undeclared.

There were occasions when Rimbolt, disgusted with his bad luck at cards, would stalk away early to his couch of pine-boughs and furs, constantly followed by the glance Essenden had grown to dread for his fellow-captive's sake. Often when Rimbolt withdrew, the brigand would thaw from his silence, and converse with Essenden on many subjects ranging from brigandage to high policy. Indeed, the young man soon discovered that between these two topics there existed a strong connection in the mind of his companion. It is, perhaps, a pity that we have here no space to set forth the

gist of these midnight interviews, for Don Q.'s point of view was apt to be original and often not lacking in humour, but it is only necessary to touch upon one of them, since it had a momentous bearing upon the future of this three-cornered intercourse.

"Your friend, the señor Rimbolt, has not unseldom commented on the brutalities which we Spaniards as a nation delight to witness. He had, if you remember, much to say about the bull-ring to-day. But he most obstinately denies that the killing of bulls in such a manner is a form of sport much in line with your method of killing foxes in England. Is not that a truth ?"

"Perhaps one may say so," replied Essenden, diplomatically, for he wanted to hear more.

"Now I further maintain, señor, that no sport can be of the highest character that does not include the element of danger. Much as I admire your English cricket, I find it falls very far short in this respect."

"Why, yes, we do not expect to get killed at any moment when playing."

"I contended that in the bull-ring each man is aware death stands at his elbow. Your friend, who is, pardon me, of a singular blindness where British institutions are concerned, upholds that a batsman requires as much *sang-froid* to defeat the ball sent against him, as a matador

who waits to give the death-blow. He argues that to win the game is the important point in both cases, and that, therefore, an equal amount of emotion is felt in both. One sees the futility of arguing with a prejudice. But it has struck me that in one particular way even Señor Rimbolt could be convinced of the truth. Suppose he were to participate in a game of cricket where a slight error with the bat or the ball would place the player in peril of his life ? "

" Cricket under such conditions is not possible," said Essenden, smiling, " and, personally, I should be very sorry to take part in it."

" On the contrary, a little cricket under such conditions could very readily be arranged, my friend," insisted Don Q., much interested. " Let us imagine an open keg of powder for a wicket, and instead of those small cylinders of wood we should balance delicately on the top a mere *mariposa*—a rushlight. The aim of those who threw the ball would be to overturn the light into the powder, while the wielder of the bat would endeavour to baffle that intention."

" The rushlight instead of bails ! I shall not ask a place in that match, señor ! "

" If by any chance," resumed Don Q., musingly, " your friend's ransom should fail to be sent—it might be possible to try how he would bear himself under such circumstances. Although he

is of an obdurate nature, we might succeed in convincing him."

Now it must be recorded, that this conversation haunted Essenden unpleasantly. The evil look Don Q reserved for Rimbolt, and that personages' conceit, brought very ominous factors into the situation. Moreover, Essenden was at a loss to account for the suppressed smirk that always sat on the features of Rimbolt whenever the subject of ransom was mentioned between them. The more he thought of it the less did Essenden like the outlook. While he waited for the conclusion of the matter, he found himself day by day comparing the two men into whose undiluted company Fate had flung him, and, strange to relate, the comparison usually resulted in favour of the brigand. For, while Don Q marched gallantly along the high road of life, Rimbolt halted in the by-ways, and carped unendingly at the shoulder-galls of daily burdens, which, in his case, were many of them self-inflicted. But Don Q., with all his faults, had the power of drawing forth respect from those with whom he came into familiar contact; he never rubbed bare as a meaner nature must; no man ever lost less of the heroic quality by reason of propinquity.

Then, on a hot and sullen afternoon, the end came. They were seated with Don Q. on the

terrace, a sun like a blood-orange hung above the misty air, the fire beside them burnt red and low. Their desultory talk had for a long half-hour waned to silence, when Rimbolt pulled himself up in the chair and spoke.

"Is it not about time that ruffian, Robledo, returned?" he said, addressing Don Q. "We should have had an answer from Ingram days ago.'

"It is true." Don Q. lit a cigarette from the butt of the last. "Perhaps, after all, señor, I shall be enabled to give you an opportunity of converting me to one of your opinions by practical proof."

"What do you mean?"

"I have been amusing myself by thinking that if you were disappointed in the arrival of your ransom, I might permit you to carry out your own suggestion, and prove to me that an English sportsman can wield the bat with as much coolness and success when his—what do you call it?—wicket?—ah, yes—when his wicket is a keg of powder with a light balanced over it, instead of the ordinary multiplicity of little sticks. In very many of our conversations you have upheld this view—"

"Nonsense! You would not dare—" Rimbolt caught himself up.

"If your ransom did not come, I should be entitled by the terms of our bargain to give you

over to my men, who, believe me, are very thorough in their treatment of a captive in so disagreeable a position," Don Q.'s cold, even voice went on; " but with my usual inclination to mercy, I have decided, should occasion arise, to allow you to prove your case in the manner I have mentioned, and also, if successful, to preserve your life." With that he left them.

Rimbolt sat still for a few moments, then rose abruptly, and with his hands deep in his pockets walked away to the other end of the terrace, where he stood looking out blankly into the mountain haze.

A touch upon Essenden's shoulder roused him. He looked up. Don Q. was at his side.

" Permit me, señor, to inform you that Robledo has arrived with the reply from señor Ingram." The brigand's bearing was altered; he was no longer the solicitous host, but the bleak captor of their first interview. Essenden unconsciously pressed his feet hard into the ground. The situation had become suddenly intense. " Is that his letter ? " he said, putting out his hand.

Without looking at the address he tore the envelope open, while Don Q. walked round to the opposite side of the fire. He read the letter once, then twice very carefully. The words confused him, their unexpectedness struck him

like a blow. This, then, was Rimbolt's foolish secret. He had applied for a ransom for Essenden only ; for himself he had relied on the weight of his political importance, and the pressure Lord Flitterby would bring to bear on the Spanish Government. The ineptitude that prompted the act, the shallow judgment that continued to approve it in the face of a growing knowledge of Don Q., fixed for ever his verdict on Rimbolt. We must give to Essenden the credit due to so capable a man as, in the next few seconds, he chose his course of action.

There was much of scorn in his mental attitude towards Rimbolt, something, too, of resignation, much of the humour which consists in laughing at oneself. Yet, in the same instant, he saw his way. That test of cool-headedness—the chance of life spoken of by the brigand—how would Rimbolt carry it through ? He had not the necessary skill, possibly not the nerve. No, Rimbolt could never do it ! Essenden dropped the letter lightly into the fire, and watched it shrivel as his fellow-prisoner came up.

" The letter has come ? " he asked, " and the ransoms— "

" For one only," replied Essenden.

" Which ? " Rimbolt's lips grew dry, and he felt some difficulty in saying the single word.

Essenden took his eyes from the charred

scrap of paper, solitary evidence of the truth. "I never did have any luck myself," he replied with a laugh, and turned away.

CHAPTER VI

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH A FAMOUS CRICKETER—(*continued*)

So it was done. It was not to save a friend, not altogether, but rather as a sequence to his own manhood that Essenden made up his mind—as something due to his own honour, to that *alter ego*, who in such crises often points out the way to a man, lest haply he should dash his self-respect against a stone. And the other, for whom the sacrifice was made, stood gorgeously unconscious of it. After that one strained moment of suspense, he fell back easily into his normal conceit, congenitally sure of himself and of his system of life, blandly superior to the rest of his race.

"What did you burn the letter for?" he asked sharply. "You very readily lose your head, Essenden. Tell me what was in it?"

"Have I not told you?" answered Essenden from his chair.

Don Q. eyed them both strangely; then at last he said with a grave dignity:

"I cannot express how greatly I regret the

duty that is forced upon me, señor Essenden. But I have lived long in the sierra, and I conceive myself to be in the position of a man whose hold on fortune and on life takes the form of a threat. I cannot set you at liberty, for by so doing I should ruin my credit in the plains. I may never forego a claim I have once made, unless under some such condition of trial or ordeal as I proposed for señor Rimbolt. The authorities down below there know that I am as good as my word at all times, on that my reputation depends, and also the safety of my men. I cannot endanger this, even for you; but if you are willing to undertake the ordeal I proposed for your companion, I now make you the same offer."

"And I accept it, señor," said Essenden.

The sun was within a hand's breadth of the peaks when the preparations were complete, and Essenden with Rimbolt was led from the Boca de Lobo, and over a high knuckle of ridge, from where they could see the pink mists rolling about the lower escarpments of the mountains, to a fairly level valley through the bottom of which brawled a mountain torrent. There on the best bit of ground available, stood the open keg of powder with an unlit rushlight set on a thin strip of wood that barely stretched across the diameter of its rim,

A bridle-path ran up the glen, and on the further hillside most of the bandits stood in a knot, crowing and gesticulating; while a few lower down were flinging a ball from one to another.

"Señor, you see the cross by the track," began Don Q., meeting Essenden, "it was erected to our poor Felipito, who friends were naturally anxious for the repose of his soul. Until the shadow of the peak behind me touches the cross you will endeavour to save yourself by repelling the ball cast at the rushlight by these men," he pointed at the group on the level. "I grieve that the bat is not better-fashioned, but we have done all in our power to make it a weapon of defence."

So armed with what was little more than a club, Essenden moved into the heart of this nightmare game. Conceive his position. The rushlight flame, bleached to white by the sun glare, flickered not five inches above the powder heaped below; the mountaineers came up to a prescribed line, and from there hurled the ball in turn. Never while he lived did he forget the scent that lived on the wind which roved through the valley. The concomitant parts of the scene were etched in on his memory then and for ever —a drunken bandit lying on the track where he had fallen on his way to the spectacle, the sky

flushed as in a picture, the soft chill of early evening, and his own grotesque employment in the mountains.

To attempt a detailed description of the next quarter of an hour would be absurd. Essenden was at once mentally submerged in the conflict, he had no eyes but for the rotation of figures who threw the ball, for the ball itself as it came hurtling towards him, and at momentary intervals for the crooked cross of Felipito shining in the golden light.

Thus through the blinding mist of excitement and effort the thin wrangling of Rimbolt's voice upraised in advice vexed him dimly as a sound vexes a dreamer.

For the most part the bandits were content to throw the ball full pitch at their mark, knowing that the slightest concussion on the barrel would bring about the tragic finale they desired. As the minutes crept by they broke into wondering cries as Essenden, active and dexterous, maintained the integrity of his defence. The chances in his favour were small enough, when one of those accidents occurred which seem to confirm the existence of some active malign principle.

He was settling to his task, congratulating himself that there was no Jack Hearne among the robbers to take advantage of the inequalities

of the ground, when one of the men, a knock-kneed creature, stumbled, and the ball flew from his hand. It struck a stone, ricochetted a yard from its course and missed the rushlight by a hair's breadth. Loud applause greeted this feat, and all tried to adopt the new style. At once the difficulties of Essenden's position became increased fivefold. The space in front of him was knobbed with roots and rocks, and the mountaineers, though ignorant of the gentle art of bowling, could throw with both force and effect. Besides, the most exigent of modern bowlers would not have desired a wider wicket. It was soon plain to Essenden that the completion of his task approached the improbable. Hitherto he had attempted no risk, but now, abandoning caution, he tried to gain time by harder hitting.

Presently a ball rose high. He swung up his club, and struck at it with all his force. It flew soaring into the air, fell from a great height upon a rock, received new life from the impact, and went bounding down the slope. Don Q. clapped his hands in approbation.

The men leaped after the ball like a pack of hounds. One outran the rest, he was not five yards behind it as it bounced more slowly and slowly towards the hollow of the river-bed. Then came a cry: "El rio! El rio!" and they paused agape. The ball bobbed for a moment or

two on the swirl of the current, and was swept out of sight.

Essenden looked at the shadow of the peak, its black head had not yet touched the broken foot of Felipito's cross. Then he turned to Don Q. and said slowly: "Lost ball, señor. I think I must claim the game."

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Don Q.'s good-bye brought, in different ways, a surprise to both his captives. He shook Essenden warmly by the hand. "Adios, Don Double E. Pray accept my felicitations. That quickly-burnt letter did not deceive me. You are a gallant fellow." Then, turning to Rimbolt, he added: "As for you, señor, whose folly brought about the danger, let me tell you a piece of news. It was your ransom which failed to be sent, and but for your friend, who imperilled his life for your sake, you must have died, for you are incapable of such hardihood as he has shown. You owe him not a mere £2000—you owę him the price a man pays for the boon of existence. You look amazed that, knowing this, I should have allowed señor Essenden to take your place. You could never comprehend my reason, yet I will give it to you. Noble deeds are rare. When one beholds such a deed planned, one stands aside in reverence, for who would dare to baffle its fulfilment?"

Robledo led the two Englishmen to the foothills, and long after he left them the thin golden air of morning brought him the echoes of Rimbolt's high note.

"Do have some consideration for others, Essenden," he was saying. "As it has turned out, you got off cheaply. Look at me! This horrible affair is going to cost me £2000."

CHAPTER VII

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH A THIEF

ONE of the most curious episodes in the career of Don Q. was that of his dealings with Penders Coppledown. It claims narration for three reasons. In the first place the facts are curious, in the second they throw a vivid light upon the character of Don Q., in the third the results which sprang from them were widespread, and formed a sequel to one of the most remarkable of our English *causes célèbres*.

Many of our readers will remember, even in these days of a plethora of press news, the name and notoriety of Penders Coppledown, erstwhile director and salaried manager of the East End Savings' Bank, and the associated Pence for the Million societies. They will remember also the flaring posters, delineating a farthing changing

by a gradation of illuminating shades into a sovereign, which at one time decorated the hoardings and high places of London. All these devices sprang from the brain of Penders Coppledown.

Nor can many people have forgotten the semblance of the man himself, his bulk, his clean-shaven, violent face, pouched eyes, and solid poses. It was possibly this hint of the ungovernable in his aspect which so much endeared him to timid investors. For at one period he enjoyed an immense popularity. Up to the moment of his disappearance not a breath had sullied the mirror of his solvency or of his character.

Then one morning London woke to find him gone, his business hideously in tatters, his intrusted millions vanished. Nor will any who saw them forget the crowd that swayed and fought with a fury pitiful in its senselessness round his offices in Mincing Lane, hoping to salve some portions of their savings, or, as it was in many cases, entire means of support, from the engulfing sea.

Meantime, in spite of the numerous expedients now in the hands of civilisation which tend to insure the capture of a fugitive from justice, Penders Coppledown made his escape. Behind him newspapers raised such a hue and cry that

it seemed to echo to the farthest corners of the English-speaking world. Men discussed him equally by Alaskan camp-fires and in Thibetan rest-houses. The police "displayed activity," "discovered clues," were said to be "determined to run the scoundrel to earth." But nothing came of all this reverberation of words. Perhaps Mr. Punch, whose arrows shot at a venture so often hit the mark, most nearly approached the truth in his famous cartoon, where a wolf, furnished with the features of Coppledown, was depicted nosing the trail of his pursuers before vanishing into the safety of a snowy steppe.

Prolonged inquiries followed. An extraordinary amount of capital, mostly composed of innumerable small deposits, had been placed in the care of the "poor man's Friend," but the bulk of it was gone, and could no more be traced than that personage himself. Many of those he left destitute must have cursed him when they realised that Coppledown not only was a rascal who had accepted payments up to the very eve of his failure, but also one of the most successful thieves of modern times.

The last facts known as to his movements were as follows: At about seven o'clock of a spring evening the great financier left his office and returned home to dress for dinner before going to entertain a large party at one of the

most fashionable restaurants in London. Shortly after eleven o'clock he bade his friends good-night, and was seen into a hansom by a commissionaire at the door. From that moment he had disappeared, and this was the more unaccountable since his face and his unusual girth were familiar to the man in the street. Up to the present hour no human being knows by what subterfuges Penders Coppledown managed to outwit the police during the first two weeks of his flight.

Suffice it to say that he reached Portugal, and for a space enjoyed Cintra. There some hint of danger must have come to him, for afterwards Setubal knew him, then Evora. Turning south, he moved from Tavira to Huelva, by boat he arrived at San Lucar. After a hurried flight to Malaga, he started for Almeria, but was never known to have arrived there.

As a matter of fact, finding the margin of escape growing less, he dropped away from the main channels of communication. He bought a stout mule, and set his face towards the little-populated sierra, where he hoped to lose himself for a while until the storm and clamour of the pursuit should have died down.

He crossed stretches of heath and of palmetto, he plunged into the forests, he lodged in solitary huts among the foothills, avoiding the clinging villages with their orchards of grey olive-trees,

and so gradually worked his way deeper and deeper into the sierra.

But a very few days brought him to a deadlock of disappointment. The food he had carried with him was gone, and to obtain any among the poor and scattered folk of that region seemed next to impossible. He was, truth to tell, at his wits' end ; the horror of a long imprisonment loomed close before him, and he wanted, oh, far more, he literally hoarded every hour left to him of life in which to enjoy in his own way the wealth he had stolen !

So, on a grey afternoon, he rode and brooded along a steep mountain-path when he fell in with a couple of Guardias Civiles.

The men drew up. " You will do well to turn back, señor ; these roads are not safe. There are many perils up above there," said the spokesman of the two.

Coppledown raised his heavy face, stubbled with a growth of beard, and laughed. He was amused that the law should be upon his side. " What perils ? " he asked with laconic badtemper.

" Have you not heard of the brigand, Don Q. ? He has returned."

Coppledown scowled and considered. A sudden wild notion took possession of him. " I have business of my own in these parts," he replied. " He would not dare to molest me."

"The devil himself can only guess what he would dare!" exclaimed the patrol. "If he should catch you, he would demand a long ransom, or he might kill you. All who fear the law take to the hills. It would be wiser, señor, to return with us to the lower road. We could guide you to an inn."

"Perhaps when you learn that I have no money to reward you, you will leave me in peace," shouted Coppledown, every line of his massive face and figure charged with a sudden brutal resentment.

The Spaniard sat still more erect in his saddle: "When the caballero has been longer in my country, he will learn that the Civil Guard do not accept money for any services they may have the good fortune to render to strangers. Good-night, señor." With that he and his comrade rode away, leaving Coppledown frowning beside the track.

He remained as they left him, tossed in a tumult of thought. When a few minutes had elapsed, he turned after the men, but halted at the corner round which they had disappeared; from there he could see them riding one behind the other at a good pace down-hill.

Then he drew back to review his position. A cold evening was settling down on the sierra. The dark scarp of rock above his head was

rendered yet more forbidding by the east wind that whistled over it. The words of the Civil Guard reiterated themselves in his brain: "All who fear the law take to the hills"; and the quality of imagination, which had so often stood his friend during his career, came to his aid. Suppose he braved the higher road. Suppose he were to be taken prisoner by these brigands. Why, here was the very hole in the net for which he had been seeking! He pictured the riding upwards, his capture, and the meeting with Don Q.

Such a man would do anything for £5000! And what was £5000 to Penders Coppledown, he who owned more than a million! He would buy a death certificate, so to speak, from Don Q. He fancied the news reaching England—

"DEATH OF PENDERS COPPLEDOWN

"MURDERED BY BANDITS IN THE SPANISH MOUNTAINS"

He foreread the press comments on his fate. "Nemesis"—they would say. "Dogged to his death by the slow foot of retribution." Perhaps finally, "May his soul rest in peace"; he did not live long to enjoy his ill-gotten wealth." Yes, they would even pity him, while he—he laughed aloud—he would stay awhile with these robbers

in the sierra till the affair was somewhat forgotten, and then, reborn with a new name, descend once more into the lower world, take ship for the Spanish Indies, and—and—

An angry spatter of rain striking upon his face brought him back to the present moment. He wrenched the mule's head round, his mind was made up. Behind were the pursuers, before him risk, but also, as he believed, an ultimate safety. Far away to the right lay the lazy sea he would one day cross again; to the left the higher sierra, rutted with their dark gorges, towered tumultuously into the sky. A cutting breeze met him. He shivered, it may be his heart doubted, but he rode on by mouldering shrines and crosses, filled with a fierce resolution to succeed. Only beast and bird made their dwelling in those waste places, and still the sterile bridle path ahead twisted away dimly into the unknown.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH A THIEF—(*continued*)

"THE pleasure is the keener because entirely unlooked for, señor," said Don Q. "A visitor rarely comes to us of his own accord."

Coppledown, stretched in a deep chair, with a flagon of wine at his elbow, eyed the brigand

askance. He had not failed to notice the manner in which the other's sombrero swept its bow of welcome. He believed in judging other men's motives and actions by his own ; he felt certain it was the way by which to reach the most correct conclusions. In Don Q.'s case, however, he was over-hasty, for he indexed him by his calling—a vital mistake.

" Of my own accord ? " A smile crossed his large fleshy face.

The brigand with chill politeness trusted his men had not used unnecessary violence.

" If to be dragged from the saddle in the bight of a rope constitutes your idea of no unnecessary violence," replied the other.

" I apologise for their zeal, señor. But what would you ? You do not carry the face of a man who readily submits."

" You are right. As I said before, if I had not wished to come I should not be here."

Don Q. reseated himself, lit a cigarette, and remarked : " This grows quite interesting. Pray, proceed, señor."

" I am half sorry I did not shoot some of your men last night," added Coppledown, suddenly smarting at the remembrance.

" And why ? They were but doing ther duty."

" Doing their duty," echoed the other, unpleasantly.

"But certainly—to me," replied Don Q., gently; yet a look shot from between his eyelids was not altogether lost upon his companion, who muttered some sort of excuse, which Don Q. accepted with dignity.

"This Don Q. has picked up good manners somehow—much in the same way as I picked them up myself, no doubt," Coppledown reflected; he was always cynically blunt with himself—one reason of his success, perhaps. "Look here, Don Q., I am going to tell you something of my personal history."

"Is it needful?" a little deprecatingly.

"Absolutely, since it leads me up to the business which has brought me here."

Don Q. inclined his head.

"My name does not matter," resumed the other, "it is sufficient to say that I was the son of wealthy parents, and while at Oxford—our most aristocratic university in England, you understand—I became entangled with a woman, older than myself—of course," with a shrug of the thick shoulders. "She infatuated me, however, and the upshot was I married her. There existed a difference of rank between us—"

"Pardon me, señor," the urbane voice of Don Q. broke in, "but on which side lay the advantage of this difference of rank?"

Coppledown turned his prominent stare upon

his companion. "She was a woman of the people, while I—"

The brigand nodded absently, yet Coppledown changed the words on his lips. "She has made my whole life an inferno. At last I got away; I went to Chili, where I spent a considerable time."

"Ah, señor, I imagined your Spanish was not of Oxford!"

"In the end my wife discovered me. Such people as she finds many to sympathise with them in England. I tell you I cannot lead that life again! But she has traced me—she is hunting me down! Curse them all!" There was a convincing fury about the man, for, indeed, as he spoke his imaginary wife had faded into the very real ranks of his pursuers, and every fibre in him was strung to outwit them. "You alone, señor, in all the world can help me."

"Pray proceed."

"You must rid me of this incubus!"

A very dark look gathered on the brigand's peaked face. "Rid you—what is it that you mean?"

"The world will soon learn that I am your captive. All that I ask you to do is to send evidence down to the plains of my death. They will not doubt but that it is true. What do you say?"

"They will certainly not doubt but that it is true," repeated Don Q., grimly.

Coppledown twisted his bulky body round with a jerk. "I'll pay you well for it," he said.

"I am not greatly influenced by sordid considerations," remarked the brigand, "and—"

"I know all about that." Coppledown put on a manner that had done him service in the heyday of his career in London. "We are men of the world, and we know the greased wheel goes faster and squeaks less. I am not a rich man—now, but I will pay you a couple of thousand pounds to send this message to the plains and to smuggle me out of the country. Come, let us clinch the bargain."

"Wait a moment, señor." Don Q. raised his hand. "You will pardon me when I say that I have my reputation to consider. I cannot mix myself up with any questionable affair."

"I see your object," interrupted the other, impatiently. "As I have said, I am no longer a rich man, but this matter happens to be of the first importnce to me, and you are forcing me to increase my offer—"

"Not at all, señor! you labour under terrible delusions. Your offers are nothing to me. *I* assess the amount of ransom; my captives have no more to do, I assure you, than to pay it," the brigand said softly.

"Well, £4000. Curse it, man, you could retire upon that!" Coppledown was standing now, a formidable bulk alive with a formidable personality.

Don Q. raised his eyes. "Be silent! for this is my last word," he said, with a sudden change of manner, "I will send you safely to the coast, and allow the authorities to make their own conclusions as to your fate up here in the sierra, and for this you will pay me £10,000. But since I am not in the mountains for purposes of plunder, if it should transpire in the meantime that you have told me a false history, or that your flight has a less innocent cause than you have led me to suppose, not ten times the sum I have named would induce me to move in the matter."

Penders Coppledown made a violent step forward—what he would have done cannot be guessed—but the brigand was already walking away into the recesses of the cave.

CHAPTER IX

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH A THIEF—(*continued*)

An interval of changeable weather followed upon that first blue day. Rain drummed on the rocks or the sun swam from a mist-bath into mid-heaven. Within the cave between these two

men, so strangely flung together by destiny, the seeds of personality began to bear fruit upon the common ground of their intercourse.

All day long Coppledown would lie in a long chair solacing the hours with tobacco and with dreams. In his thoughts of the tropic land of his desire, his mind dwelt with an odd persistency on the vivid-feathered birds.

The man was a voluptuary, but also an artist in the shades of living. Lying there, heavy in much flesh, he toyed with the promise of the future ; was alternately assailed with the minutest thorns of doubt, or abandoned himself to the weaving of chains of golden web from the material of a ray of sunshine. In that great body beat such nerves of sensibility as none would have suspected. Neither the artistic sense nor even something of the romanceful outlook was lacking in his mental furnishing. Sensualist, positivist, and dreamer, yet he was through all the disciple of naked expedience.

So Penders Coppledown lived and grew familiar with the daily iteration of life among the mountains. His eyes saw new things. The sky a vault to hold the winds or burnt hot and blue with sunshine, swooping birds on ragged wings, the fires and the bandits who sprawled near them, even the air of tame savagery that hung about the glen—these things painted themselves into

a background against which his thoughts moved in panoramic guise.

Thus the drama moved to its completion, while each man read by snatches in the books of the other's personality, as a penniless scholar reads in a volume he cannot buy at a bookstall. At one point of their first interview Coppledown had become keenly alive to certain ominous possibilities in his captor. Later on he discovered, or fancied he discovered, signs of speciousness in his host's conversation, which, indeed, were wholly imaginary. Thus his early impression of the inexorable in Don Q. became somewhat obscured.

All the while the brigand watched Penders Coppledown from the intimate point of vantage, sitting always opposite at the same table, meditating beside the same twilight fire, and whereas to the mental eye of Coppledown there took shape a false Don Q., each hour crystallised to the more alert intelligence of the brigand the true proportions of milk and gall that went to make up his captive's rather monstrous individuality.

Among the various species of human beings likely to provoke dislike in Don Q., Coppledown was calculated to take a chief place. The brigand writes of him: "This man possesses all the qualities which I imagine make for success

in the world of business, and for enjoyment of the grosser pleasures, but I look in vain for a single higher trait which should endear him to his fellow-men. His mind is a gigantic ledger with all humanity entered on the debit side."

So life droned on, Penders Coppledown still drowsing through the afternoons, wallowing in anticipations, until the day came that hurled him from that Nirvana into the exigencies of a present struggle.

The development could not have been avoided, for who can guard against the accidental? Readers of these chronicles may remember one Gaspár, a knotty man of evil aspect, but an excellent brigand, and, after Robledo, perhaps of all Don Q.'s men the best. It so happened that this Gaspár, at the time of Don Q.'s return, was working in Barcelona as a cleaner of the bullring. As soon, however, as the news came to him and the rallying call, the man threw up his occupation, which indeed seemed to be no more than cigarette-smoking on weekdays and scattering sand over the bloodstains on Sundays, and started for the Boca de Lobo, taking with him as many of the most recent newspapers as he could collect, for his master's reading.

A still more remote cause had also a heavy bearing on Coppledown's fortunes. Away in England in a back office behind Fleet Street,

the cosmopolitan gentleman, sometime tutor to the heir of the Duke of Peckham, and presently London correspondent of a Spanish paper, by over-indulgence in pleasure, fell short of news, and, as his custom was under such circumstances, purchased some photographs, the insertion of which would fill up the column of his omissions. Among these photographs was one of Penders Coppledown. In due time the paper in Spain reproduced this picture, and a very good likeness was the result. Below it were set out some striking finger-posts as to the career of the original.

Gaspár, being aware that *El Mundo* was a journal held in esteem by his lord in the mountains, bought copies of the last weeks' issues, and started to resume his old life.

At the nightfall of a blusterous day of drying winds he came to the Boca de Lobo. The newspapers were sent up to the cave, where the brigand, with his usual courtesy, passed the more recent ones over to Coppledown, while he opened the others.

The lamp had been early lighted, and the two men were seated near the fire, a table with the lamp between them.

Coppledown looked up suddenly as if some touch on his nerves had startled him. Conceive the scene. Don Q. had a ten-days' old *El*

Mundo open before his face, and he appeared to be reading with interest. On the next page, which for the moment was turned back, Coppledown saw, swimming in the light beneath the lampshade, his own likeness. So clear was it that he discerned a dark line across it where some graving tool had scored the block.

Coppledown gazed for an instant at the bald head above the top of the newspaper. He had but a moment in which to act. Long ago he had made up his mind as to the kind of man with whom he would have to deal should events bring him into conflict with his captor. Here was the event come. For he realised that if ever the eyes of Don Q. rested upon the portrait reproduced from the defective block, it was likely, and more than likely, that a new cross would front no distant morning in the gorges.

After the manner of his race, Pender Coppledown grew suddenly cool and his muscles tightened. Lifting his heavy foot, he kicked over the table with the lamp upon it. His objective was, of course, the paper. Don Q. moved sharply back at the fall. The lamp shot beyond him, smashed upon the floor, and went out. At the same moment Coppledown leaped across the overturned table, and tore the paper from the brigand's hands.

"Take care!" he shouted stridently, crushing

up the sheet, and thrusting it into the wood fire.

It flared, the folds reopening slowly under the action of the flames. He felt rather than saw a quick movement on the part of Don Q. For what was that clearly picked out in the centre of the circle of fire? A face framed in ripples of red smoulder with a dark graving line across the cheek. Of the four portraits on the sheet only his own appeared, as if the finger of Fate, which he so often railed at, had written his accusation in letters of fire.

He turned to Don Q. Their glances encountered, and at that moment Coppledown, using his immense strength, tore a leg from the table and rushed like a baresark upon the brigand.

But a life of alarms, and his many necessities, had equipped Don Q. with great qualities of personal warfare. Coppledown was quick in his rush, but Don Q. was quicker still. Springing to one side, he flung his cloak round his antagonist's feet and jerked it sharply. The huge man fell forward like a mast.

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Very slowly Penders Coppledown gathered his mental forces together, consolidating his will, his inherent strength of purpose, and that ruthless instinct of self-preservation to which he owed so many of his former victories over men.

Physically he was helpless, bound hand and foot, while over against him brooded Don Q.

The brigand had spent the last hour in reading and considering all that *El Mundo* had, in later editions, told its readers of the swindle of the East End Savings' Bank and Pence for the Million Societies, and of their colossal promoter.

"So you are Penders Coppledown?" he said at length; "and you lied to me."

"No. To be quite correct, I bluffed. I played a game—to win."

"I was about to say I do not wonder that you lied." Don Q. brushed the back of his hand across the papers on his knee.

"All is fair in business."

"What a detestable creed! Yet it was that upon which you habitually acted. You lied to me because you were assured that I could not give my protection to one whose career had been so infamous."

"I do not follow you." Coppledown forced himself to speak quietly. "In conducting my business, I was the ordinary business man using the ordinary business methods."

"No, señor; for I, Don Q., am likewise a business man in one aspect of my life."

"And what of the infamy of *your* career?" roared Coppledown.

"My worst enemies will tell that no poor man

or woman, no widow or orphan, no helpless, crippled, or aged people have ever been a peseta the worse for me. No, these unhappy folk ask for justice, charity, and at my hands have never yet been refused. But what do I read here? You indulged your gross body on the savings of the thrifty and the already indigent; you swallowed the livelihood of those who dwelt always on the borderland of starvation. Why do I waste my words? You have doubtless read of that black procession of suicides which followed upon your disappearance. I have but one question to ask you—what have you done with the money of which you deprived those wretched ones?"

Penders Coppledown's big face lowered at him. "What is that to you?"

"We shall come to that point presently."

"Oh, I understand it now! Your demand for a ransom is about to grow in proportion to my alleged wealth," sneered Coppledown, furiously.

To his surprise the brigand replied in his soft voice: "There is something of truth in your guess. I now require you to give me full information as to where that million and a quarter, which you have stolen, is waiting for you to regain it. Next I shall endeavour to persuade you to send instructions for the repayment out

of that fund of those poor creditors who trusted you. When this is fully done, there will still doubtless be a remainder upon which you can continue to enjoy some moderate pleasures of life."

Coppledown's smile was evil. "Look here, Don Q., or whatever you call yourself, in this affair you have shown considerable sagacity, but there is just one factor with which you have not reckoned."

"Which is?"

"That immutable man as you may believe yourself to be, you have not realised that I am equally immutable. Yes," he went on, raising his voice, "in this gross body, as you called it, you will find a stark man, one whom you cannot compel! Now attend to my offer. I will procure for you £20,000 to give me my liberty; if you will not take that, you shall get nothing!"

"I fear that you have failed to understand my words." Don Q. moved so as to envisage the other man more directly.

"Not a bit of it! I can read you easily. Like all bargainers, you begin by asking more, far more than you intend to close for. You have had my last word, however." The tremendous resistance of will in the man seemed almost palpable.

"Señor, I do not bargain. As I have said, so it shall be, no more no less!"

Coppledown's under lip closed in viciously. "Then you are about to kill me. Well, I do not fear death."

"Not at this moment," put in the brigand. "But we have a proverb in my language, 'Never say, This bread I will not eat.'"

"You think to force me by torture."

"No," came the unexpected answer, "you are merely to have such an experience as you have provided for those others—who trusted you."

The brigand clapped his hands. Robledo entered the cave. "The barrel is prepared, Robledo?"

"Yes, lord."

"And Gaspár has safely affixed the pulley?"

"Yes, lord."

"Good! Now assist this señor to rise, and loosen the ropes for walking. Then lead him to the tree."

By the light of torches a procession formed itself, Coppledown between two brigands going first, then Don Q. alone, after him a mob of his men moving quietly, but hugely entertained at the punishment in store for the fat Englishman. They halted under the group of trees at the head of the glen.

Don Q. pointed upwards to where the winds

roared among the branches, and Coppledown saw dimly that a barrel had been slung high up towards the crest of the highest tree.

"You are about to be placed in that barrel, Señor Coppledown, where you will suffer cold and hunger, discomfort and misery, and there will be none to help you. With these things your victims in England must now be well acquainted. And you will remain up there unless your heart relents towards them," said Don Q. "Gaspár, proceed with your work."

With some difficulty and a good deal of laughter, Coppledown was fastened into the barrel, which was hoisted and securely lashed into position. Then a great fire was kindled at a short distance, round which the appointed guard lay at ease.

And so that dreadful night began. The tree rocked and groaned under its unaccustomed burden, and as the hours wore away the gusts of wind grew louder and stronger. Demons of cold and cramp plucked at the prisoner's pampered flesh, and he endured attacks of giddiness and sickness from the violent swaying of the tree. Above, to his unsteady gaze, the stars whirled in the tree-tops; below the dizzy earth fell away in the gloom. At intervals he could see the men sleeping by the fire wrapped in their warm cloaks under the lee of the cliff,

while he pictured to himself with a shuddering horror the breaking of the tree, and—

It is a fact that, after all, pleasure is relative, and long before the small hours Coppledown found himself longing more for warmth and safe footing—merely those elementary comforts —than ever he had longed for the Spanish Indies and the paradise of golden-plumaged birds.

Dawn came at length with a slant of rain, blowing out for an instant the dancing stars. Clad in sober black and grey, with no hint of colour, the cold day crept across the peaks like a wolf drenched in storms. And Penders Coppledown watched it come, oh, how slowly. For, sick and cramped, hungry and shivering, worn out with the wrenching battle of the tree, he had had enough of Don Q.'s discipline.

But had a similar desperate ruin of his plans happened to him in London, unquestionably Penders Coppledown would not have hesitated to kill himself at the dramatic moment rather than submit to it, for there he would have cut something of a figure in the eyes of the world and gained some amount of sympathy. But here he only made a sorry spectacle for a score or two of grinning bandits—besides, if he escaped, life might hold a good deal still for a man yet on the sunny side of middle age !

He shouted to the robbers, he called to the

changing guard to bring Don Q., but they paid no heed. And it was not till the heats of mid-day were pouring on his head, and his sufferings seemed intolerable, that Don Q. came up the incline and stood below the tree, while Penders Coppledown categorically agreed to his proposals.

Later he was told that he must be content to remain in the sierra until certain friends of Don Q.'s in England, "of indisputable honour, such as Sir Graham Marks, with whom it may be you are acquainted," should be able to send assurance that the restored money had been punctiliously applied to its assigned purpose. Throughout the arrangements Coppledown kept a keen eye on every detail, and one unasked question burned on his tongue. At last a day came when he put it squarely to the brigand.

"Your men—and you—where do you come in? How do you profit?" he asked.

"For my men, señor, they are satisfied with the £300 found upon you at the time of your capture. For myself—I am glad to reflect that these poor clients of yours are once again happy. I want nothing more," said Don Q., adding with with a thin, sardonic smile: "You cannot believe that, but nevertheless it is true."

Penders Coppledown made no reply, but perhaps not the least queer part of a very queer episode was that he did believe it.

CHAPTER X

HOW DON Q. HAD NEED OF A SURGEON

THE winter had been hard. Don Q. wearied of the inertia of existence, and, perhaps, even more of the persistent thoughts which preyed upon him during such periods of inactivity, resolved, although the season was full early, to make a hunting trip after ibex, the more particularly as news had been brought to him of an old ram with magnificent horns which had been seen kneeling on the edge of a remote precipice, as if keeping watch over the country below.

The brigand set out with four of his following, only to be met on the higher levels by heavy snowstorms, which succeeded each other in an increasing rancour.

On the evening of the first day the exhausted mules had to be left behind, while the little party pushed forward on foot. Next morning they turned out to face again deep drifts, slippery rocks, ice-cold torrents, and it was during this period of physical stress that the brigand felt the first warning of that disease which was destined to levy upon his delicate frame so terrible a tax of suffering.

He has recorded that his return journey to

the cave seemed a long dream of agony, but with almost miraculous self-control he impressed his men with the idea that fatigue accounted entirely for his condition. Several days' rest and the warmth of his cave gave temporary relief, but as time drew on the attacks of pain grew more and more frequent and intense. "To be overcome by a malady in the sierra, more especially for a master of wolves such as I am, is, I am well aware, little short of a sentence of death. I have always known that I must die in the mountains; I think the time approaches." So he wrote.

Yet no individual of his band suspected the truth nor imagined that anything beyond one of his habitual fits of depression ailed their lord. His meals were brought to him as usual; he ate little, yet covered the fact by dropping a portion of food into the fire; but presently came a time when he would afterwards lie back in the agony induced by even that slight effort.

He was far from medical help, but by degrees his mind turned towards the white city, which lies across the bay from Gibraltar, where could be found men with knowledge, who might aid him to fight this new and intangible enemy. After some reluctance he made up his mind to procure from one of them such relief as was possible. To carry out this purpose Robledo was

sent down to the plains. He started in a pink evening mist, the herald of summer, while Don Q., panting on his couch, battled with the pain that beset him.

It would be difficult to describe the sufferings of the brigand. Through every hour he felt disease mining its implacable way to the core of his life. He could do nothing—only wait and endure; he never complained, but he was dipped into a depth of despondency, and, as his strength served, wrote many letters for the final arrangement of his affairs. "Day by day," we read, "I grow weaker, the foundations of my life tremble. I will not deny I have dreamed of an end other than this. More than once during this latter time I have been tempted to ask my revolver to do me a last service."

Such, then, was the point of current history in the Boca de Lobo when Robledo passed down from the thin breath of the sierra into the warm atmosphere of the plains. His errand had alarmed him, and while he travelled his mind, working anxiously over the past weeks, recognised the calamitous fact of Don Q.'s failing health. The suspicion drove him on at speed, for from this man at least Don Q. had gathered a full tribute of devotion.

The instructions of the young bandit were simple. He carried a note to the leading doctor

in the city. It contained a courteous request for a visit in the sierra on an errand of life and death. It went on to assure security and safe conduct, and ended with a magnificent offer as touching fees. But the recipient of the letter at once definitely declined to run the risk of the undertaking. Robledo appealed to the doctor—through an intermediary, for the mountaineer does not easily trust the city dweller—declaring himself to be an unfailing guide with a good reputation, and vowing that no harm but much increase of wealth would result from the little journey. All to no purpose, and Robledo, heavy with despair, made his way back to the outskirts of the city to bid his wife farewell before he carried the news of his failure upwards to the sierra.

Perhaps some who have read the former chronicles will remember that Robledo's wife, Isabellilla, was a woman of resource. It is here enough to say that within half-an-hour she started with him for the foothills.

There were few people in England at that period to whom the name of Sir William Gasterton, the famous surgeon, was unfamiliar. Those who did not know him personally probably imagined him to be a man on the wrong side of fifty, grown grey in the service of science and humanity, but in reality he was scarcely thirty-

five, and had been early forced into prominence by the sheer force of his genius. His friends described him as of an original though perhaps eccentric disposition; his enemies spoke of his infernal capacity for giving and taking offence. Both, at any rate, agreed that for his heroic pursuit of knowledge he deserved not only well of his country, but of the whole human race.

About the period of this story, Sir William proposed to take a holiday in Spain. On the eve of setting out, a millionaire patient offered him a fee of ten thousand guineas to cross the Atlantic to perform an operation.

Whether, as is possible, something in the wording of the letter annoyed him, or whether, having made up his mind to go to Spain for rest and change, he would be denied neither, no one can say. But he absolutely refused, and May found him in Grenada, were he spent more time in examining the mineral springs of Lanjaron than in exploring the Alhambra. Hearing of other springs in Andalucia, as yet but little known, he visited that province, and by a coincidence had an interview with the *confrère* to whom Don Q. had that very day sent his appeal for aid. This individual told Gasterton the story of the mysterious letter, adding that he would certainly not accept its invitation.

"But why?" inquired Sir William, hotly.

The other raised his eyebrows and laughed. "It comes probably from the brigand, Don Q. Why should I adventure my life?"

"The question to me is rather—" The English doctor pulled himself up with his curious air of self-repression, and turned to talk of certain mineral waters, which he had been told were within a day's ride of the city.

Gasterton made a start next morning, Robledo and his wife followed on the same road early in the afternoon.

The springs were situated close to a hamlet of picturesque, tumble-down houses that clung to a precipitous slope of the lower mountain range. Not the least wretched of the hovels was the inn, where the Englishman left his valise, and, repelling the pleasant courtesy of the *patrón*, went off at once to see the springs. He examined the small, clear pools with their sparkling bubbles ever rising and breaking on the surface of the water; he tasted and tested and made notes, so a couple of hours passed quickly enough, and he was still engrossed in his work when a soft voice startled him.

"I do not understand Spanish," he answered with absent brusqueness.

But the voice went on, shaken with tears. Gasterton looked round, then, in spite of him-

self, looked again, for the speaker was a most beautiful woman. She held out her hand, and he comprehended that she was imploring his help to save the life of one she loved. After a moment's hesitation, he nodded, and in a second a young mountaineer, handsome, worn, and sad-eyed, appeared, leading a shaggy mule by a nose-halter of rope. Sir William mounted the padded cloth that served for saddle, and the three set their faces upwards.

A goatherd in passing exchanged a word or two with the young fellow at his bridle-rein, but Gasterton only remembered this later, when, night having almost fallen, they came upon an encampment of wild-looking men seated round a blazing fire fed with pine.

By this time, it must be confessed, he was beginning to grow uneasy as to the outcome of the mission upon which he had unthinkingly embarked, and, whether he looked back to the gloom of the forest from which they were emerging, or forward to the grey desolation of brushwood above, he realised that he was in a position more than likely to turn out ill. To do him justice, his spirit did not quail, not even when his refusal to proceed was met by a rush of the red and yellow-capped figures from the fire, who overpowered him—not without trouble—and who hurried him on in the teeth

of a biting wind. Darkness fell, but the party carried torches, which, as they mounted higher, gave glimpses of the bleached branches of the *piornales*, hovering like skeletons on the edge of the passing glow.

During the tedious hours of riding, Gasterton may have pictured to himself the brigand chief as some fierce, heavy-handed dweller in the mountains; but he found instead a fragile, cultured gentleman, who spoke beautiful Castilian, and over whose face, to his practised eye, the rim of the Great Shadow already rested.

CHAPTER XI

HOW DON Q. HAD NEED OF A SURGEON— (*continued*)

By this time the hot convulsion of his anger at being tricked had crystallised into strange shapes of resolve. He had gathered more than an inkling of Don Q.'s purpose, having knowledge of the note to the Spanish doctor to guide him, and with a deep resentment he set himself to see the matter through.

To his surprise the men were ordered back to the valley, while he was left alone and unbound

in the warm and firelit cave where the brigand lay on a rough couch made soft with furs.

"Señor, you know who I am?" the brigand asked in his gentle manner.

"I understand you are the man known as Don Q., a brigand," was the reply.

"And I also know you by report. Although I live among the mountains remote from the world, some echoes of that which is great and famous reach me. Your renown, señor, has penetrated to our valley." He paused and looked expectantly at his companion.

But Sir William sat in silence, the strong, self-imposed silence which marked him. He was a man temperamentally outside the range of ordinary small courtesies; besides, his position seemed to him intolerable.

"I repeat, señor, that your name is well known to me, and I have largely rewarded the man and woman who, on their own initiative, secured me the advantage of your presence here."

"What? You encouraged the baseness that could betray me under the circumstances?" Gasterton's eyes blazed contempt. "It is, however, not astonishing!"

"I am very well aware that it was the noble instinct of the healer of men which overcame your natural reluctance, which gave you courage to follow two strangers into our wild sierra.

But Robledo and his wife did not deceive you, they did not allure you away under false pretences, for I, their master, am most desperately in need of your help."

Gasterton's compressed lips uttered no reply, though bitterness seemed hovering visibly about them. After a distinct pause he spoke, passing over without comment the last speech of Don Q.

"Let us limit ourselves to the only subject of discussion possible between us. What is to be the amount of my ransom?"

"I do not propose to ask any sum in ransom."

"What then?"

"A service."

Sir William knew well what was coming; his ear detected the increasing weakness in the brigand's voice, for this interview had almost absorbed Don Q.'s strength, but he nevertheless intended to make the asking of a favour as hard a matter as he could make it. His face grew increasingly repellent. "Ask it."

"You see I am ill."

"You wish to consult me?"

"Yes, as your other patients consult you—for any fee you think proper. I am a rich man, and there will be no need to consider economies."

Gasterton laughed suddenly, a biting laugh, plainer in its meaning than words. "As far as

an examination is concerned, and so far only, I place myself at your service," he said. Then with the tender and skilful hands of his craft, he moved Don Q.'s couch into a better light beside the opening of the cave, and helped him to turn and shift his position. Patiently and carefully he made such investigation as was possible, then, placing the sick man once more in comfort, he sat down and regarded the peaked face with a strange, keen glance.

"Your condition is extremely serious," he began, and in a few cold words he pronounced Don Q.'s sentence of death.

"It is then impossible to save my life?" The unaltered suavity of the brigand's weak voice surprised the hearer.

"Certainly, unless you were to undergo an operation."

"If I do not undergo this operation, how long do you give me of life?"

"A week a month, I cannot determine the period, but it must be short."

"You are, I understand, a marvellous surgeon, and the greatest living authority on this disease of mine?" inquired Don Q.

Sir William made an impatient movement. "Some people may choose to say so."

"Then, señor, you shall operate at once. I place myself in your hands with entire confidence

that you will exert your skill to save my life. My good fortune has sent you to me at the right moment."

Gasterton's lip twitched oddly. "Do not rely on me," he said. "For one thing, I have no instruments here— "

"That need not distress you," returned Don Q., faintly. "Your baggage, which you left in the city, will arrive in a few hours, and I have given orders that certain drugs and appliances should be obtained—I imagined an operation" —his head fell back. "Brandy—call no one." The husky whisper was hardly audible.

Gasterton rose at once, and did all that could be done; but as soon as Don Q. regained some amount of strength, he spoke at once.

"I refuse to perform any operation upon you." There was a curious suggestion of malignancy in the refusal.

"You refuse?" repeated Don Q., incredulously.

"I absolutely refuse."

"But you accompanied Isabellilla of your own will to give your aid to a sick person."

"Yes, that is true. The woman's distress touched me; perhaps, being only a man, her beauty appealed to me." Gasterton replied with a rasping candour, "I believed her child was ill, not a man such as you are!"

"But why? You were only compelled to come after you grew suspicious and wished to turn back. I do not regard you as a captive. I offer you freedom, and any fee you name in return for your help. What more would you have?"

"I want nothing from you. I have spent almost twenty years in learning the dexterity, the skill, the knowledge which you ask me to use for your recovery, but I did not spend those years in order to prolong the life of a man who is a robber—a mur—"

Don Q. sat up panting on his couch. "To insult a dying man is the feather of the coward's cap!" he exclaimed. "I would have given you freedom—all I had to give. What? Would you kill me?" for Gasterton had sprung to his feet half involuntarily.

But at Don Q.'s upraised arm he stiffened, "What do you suppose I am?" he exclaimed thickly. "I am not a murderer! You are safe for me, whatever—yes, whatever happens!" He finished harshly, holding his head high.

Don Q. sat silent, and palpitating with his recent movement. "Then I accept your pledge in its entire meaning. Now tell me how long I have to live, and as the answer will be of the extremest interest to you, I beg you to make a careful calculation."

"I give you ten, perhaps even twenty days —maybe a little longer."

"And I, in return, give you exactly the same period of life. When I die, you also shall die. Well, señor, we have spoken our minds, both of us. We are going on a long journey together. Till we start upon it, let us, if possible, brush aside our differences and live in amity."

You can imagine that it was strange company which these two condemned men kept one another through the days of brightening summer. In both burned similar fires of obstinacy, of resentment for injury done. Not much unlike either in attitude, in thought, or even in those dreams which creep over the mind when the finality of existence, the port to which the human ship is blown by winds as ancient, as inexorable as time, rises into sight over the rim of life. And in spite of warring prejudices, the very power, the galling insistiveness of each struck some answering chord in the nature of his companion.

So each day brought home to Gasterton the fact that the courage of the man who lay upon the couch of furs was stiffened to a quality far above the ordinary, for Don Q. never complained, the manner of his life had led him to eschew sympathy. It was a strange experience to this

doctor, used, as he was, to the inevitable groping towards companionship, the pitiful hand the dying thrust out to clasp another human hand in the supreme hours, to find here a man from whom neither pain nor the approaching close of life could wring even a phrase of appeal or self-pity.

And, it must be owned, that in the end Gasterton, as he watched, watched in admiration. He, too, in a like position would have shrunk from sympathy as flesh from an acid; he too, he conceived, was above posing, and through the layers of hardening experience, of ambition, of a certain embittered converse with his kind, which covered like an armourplate his ultimate humanity, he acknowledged Don Q. as his equal in the very characteristics in which he held himself to be above the bulk of mankind.

On the first night of his arrival, after the momentous conversation that has been already narrated, Don Q. had called Robledo and Isabellilla into his cave, and before the famous surgeon he had told Robledo of his sickness, and that it was possible death might come to him during Sir William Gasterton's stay among the mountains. No words further, no command had passed between Don Q. and the young mountaineer, but Gasterton had read plainly in the nervously-closed hand of Robledo, as in the

stormy eyes of his wife, that when their beloved lord set forth upon his long journey, short shrift would be given to that other soul which was destined to keep him company.

After this Don Q's manner had changed to that of a kindly host. By slow degrees an intimacy of ideas and of experiences grew up between the two men. Sometimes late in the night, or perchance in the early hours of the morning, for to neither of them was much sleep habitual, Gasterton would be led on to speak of the things he had seen, of men he had met, of the struggles of his career; and Don Q., in his turn, would narrate (and no man could tell a story better) episodes of an earlier life, through which sometimes the identification of a great name would bear witness to the position the brigand had relinquished on that bitter day when he rode, a self-sentenced exile, through the snowy defiles of the sierra.

Thus for six days, and on the seventh Gasterton found himself preferring a request. It was late on a thunderous afternoon, and a long silence had fallen, which was broken by Sir William's voice.

"Now that I have come to know you better," he said, "there is a favour I would ask of you."

"Except in one particular, señor," replied

Don Q., "I am, as you are aware, quite at your service."

"Will you allow me," said Gasterton, bluntly, "to draw a small—a small—amount of blood from your arm?"

Don Q.'s grey, peaked face rose from the pillow in a stare at the extraordinary request. "You will at least explain to me, señor, to what end?"

"You already know that I have spent the later years of my life in constant endeavours to open up the history and causes of the disease from which you suffer. At the present moment we have, both of us, some two to five weeks more of life. I have never come across a more interesting instance of this ailment than yours, and it has occurred to me that if you will permit me to describe in manuscript exactly the course of your case, I would bequeath my notes to my colleagues in England, and they may prove of very great value to humanity."

Don Q. raised himself on his elbow, and for a moment so strange a light burned in his sunken eyes that Sir William expected an outbreak of fury. But the first words of the brigand convinced him of his mistake.

"Most willingly, señor," cried Don Q., "do agree to your wish, and, permit me to say, that it is one that causes me lively emotions of

gratification. It would be something to me, seeing that I must die, to know that the manner of my death may not be without its uses to mankind. It will, at least, be a consolation to one who had hoped to die in another fashion."

From that time forth a table with note-books, instruments, and such other apparatus as he needed was set aside for Gasterton's use. At this he sat hour after hour writing, re-writing, often thinking, his head buried in his hands; he was now absorbed, eager, now anxiously questioning, self and the impending moment blotted out in ardour and the engrossment of his work. And Don Q. lay and watched him, or in the intervals of pain held with him brief, pregnant conversations, from which the world to-day draws incalculable benefit.

It was a situation such as perhaps has never before sprung into existence in the history of man.

And now it must be confessed that the constant sight of Don Q. stretched upon his bed of suffering, and always uncomplaining, began to raise doubts in the mind of Gasterton.

Day and night the insistive question surged in his brain—was he justified in refusal—was he justified? At the outset he had held himself to be entirely justified in his resentment of the fact that the instinct of the healer which had

led him to think little of danger had been made use of to betray him.

Yet, was he justified? The answer became clearer every day; yet here again the character of the man balked his righteous impulse.

Since his sentence was that when Don Q. died he also must die, there arose in him a lively fear lest if he now consented to perform the operation wrong motives might be attributed to him by the man whose respect he had come to feel he would not lightly lose or forfeit. So, that, had the initiative remained with Gasterton, it is hard to tell what tragedy might have resulted that advancing summer in the Boca de Lobo. The initiative, however, came from another, perhaps, nobler source.

CHAPTER XII

HOW DON Q. HAD NEED OF A SURGEON— (*continued*)

It so happened one evening that Sir William had gone out for a stroll, and, after climbing up to the forehead of the gorge and listening to the winds among the pines, he returned over their fallen needles, and finally mounted with his quiet, sick-bed step to the cave.

Feeling that he could not for the moment look upon the suffering within, and, assailed by many influences—by the mood of the evening, by the long trouble of his thoughts, at the end of which was always a black, contorted, and gigantic note of interrogation, set there, it seemed to the doctor's questioning mind, by a Power over and above humanity. Pausing thus, there came to him a sound of Spanish voices—he had begun to understand that tongue fairly well—the one dry, full of effort, the second charged with the note of hopeless sorrow, the third a fierce contralto, easily recognisable, as that of Robledo's tempest-hearted wife.

Before he could follow his instinct to move away, the surgeon had heard enough to hold him prisoner.

"You will see that this caballero," Don Q. was saying, "passes down from the sierra in safety. It is true that he cannot cure me, for a reason, that you, my poor Robledo, could never understand. He is a man who possesses the courage of his convictions—but I wander. He believes that the hour of my death will be his own."

"As it will, as it will! We have sworn it, Robledo and I," cried the woman's voice.

"Isabellilla, I have never yet been disobeyed." Don Q.'s words were growing weak. "This

caballero is a very brave man, and when the hour comes, he must, under your protection and that of Robledo, go down to the city in safety. When you part with him, tell him that it was I who gave him his life." A sob and an indistinct protest broke in, but Don Q. resumed, "Swear to me this shall be done."

He heard no more but turned down the path, for he must think before he faced the brigand again. By the time he came back to the cave he found Don Q. had fallen asleep. He hesitated a moment and looked at his watch—it was not yet six o'clock. He remembered that Don Q had been able to take no food that day, he hurried to his table—then hesitated again, the anesthetic in his hand, for the risk that lay before him was sufficient to make most men pause. If Don Q. died under the operation, his own fate was certainly sealed, as nothing would persuade the band that Gasterton had not murdered him horribly! Well, he must face that chance.

At 7.10 the operation was complete.

For days following, life and death battled together for Don Q. Gasterton, watching him, saw the grey shadow creep and flicker across his face, then sink again, only to return. Perhaps never in his career had the great surgeon fought so grim a bout as now. In his spare frame lay immense possibilities of staying power. He

hardly knew whether it was night or day. All his fundamental obstinacy came into the struggle. He slept by snatches in his chair, and, even through his sleep, the scene before his waking eyes hardly left him.

The black walls, the shaded lamp, Don Q. on his couch incongruously like some bird of the elder world. Isabellilla, installed by the patient, brooding, fiercely maternal, nursing back to life the man who had gained through tortuous ways, perhaps, so great a hold upon her affection. Over all flickered the firelight, showing by the door the crouched figure of Robledo, suspicious, frowning, sombre as the sad brown hills, which were all he knew or cared to know of the wide world.

At last there came a change and hope, and Gasterton beckoned to Isabellilla. His watch-weary eyes met hers, and he read something of doubt, something of jealousy, even.

"I desire," said he, "that you make me a promise."

"I listen," said the Spanish woman.

"When he wakes," said the doctor, "when he wakes to consciousness, as he soon will, you must tell him nothing of all this. You must allow him to think that he owes the continuance of his life to his own strong constitution, not to my skill. Promise me this."

"I promise."

Don Q. stirred, and Gasterton, bending over him, drew back, laid his finger on the pulse, then, turning to Isabellilla in the old ungracious way, he said: "The man will live."

The convalescence of Don Q. was necessarily slow. By him watched Isabellilla, and Gasterton, his task over, came rarely to the bedside—but twice a day, in fact, night and morning, when he carried on with cold accuracy his scientific observations. For the rest of the time he wandered about the gorge, noting with an idle eye the nesting of two ravens, which for twenty years had carried on the cares of family life among the pines at the head of the ravine. How would the brigand now interpret the bargain that they should die in the same hour? A word of explanation, and Don Q. would doubtless have given him liberty, but Gasterton was already half-intolerant of his own late doings, and pride drove him on to let events find their own issue.

The heats of summer found Don Q. again on his terrace with Gasterton beside him.

"The disease is broken in me," began the brigand. "It would seem, señor, that your knowledge has for once betrayed you. And now the time has come to renew that conversation in which you refused to afford me the only help that seemed at the time of vital necessity."

Gasterton said nothing.

"At that time, señor," continued Don Q., "I declared that we should die in the same hour. But the situation has changed, and I have decided on the course of action which it seems to me just to pursue."

Gasterton still held to his gift of silence.

"Señor, I offer you a choice," went on Don Q.; "for I shall still hold you to the bargain I made with you now many weeks ago. Either you will remain with me in the mountains, or else you shall give me your word of honour that if I let you go to carry on your work in the world, you will, on receiving the well-attested news of my death, take immediate measures to end your own life."

For a moment Gasterton kept his eyes on the ground, then he looked up.

"To remain here," he replied, "would be to waste not only my future, but the good of my past years of labour. I am forced, therefore, to give the promise you exact, and I will leave this place to-morrow by the first light."

Travel now to London and across a month of time. Sir William Gasterton is waiting in his consulting-room to find words in which to pronounce the irrevocable sentence upon one of those poor waifs, high-placed and wealthy in

the ordinary sense, whom Destiny has flung broken-winged across his threshold.

The few phrases conveyed with them a sympathy, the lack of which had once been the great surgeon's greatest failing; their recipient was shown out into the rainy street, and Sir William turned to find a letter bearing the Spanish postmark lying on his desk.

Was this *his* death-warrant? he thought, and stood still with an involuntary shock of feeling. It had seemed hard to live with that sword above him, and now that it was about to fall, how much would be lost, how much would be lost! But the next moment he was opening the envelope with the care and deliberation that attended many of his actions.

"SIR WILLIAM GASTERTON," he read, "among the numerous great qualities which go to form your character, and which have placed you in the front rank of the noblest profession in the world, my observation of you during your stay in the sierra led me to conclude that one, and that a most important one, was conspicuously absent. You, señor, when you travelled into the mountains in the last days of April lacked sympathy. You were case-hardened, it may be, or you had never yourself known anything but health. For this reason, señor, I have

allowed you—notwithstanding your great services to me, of which I was all along well aware—to live for some weeks in the Shadow. I now give you back your word; and if you will divest yourself of prejudice, I trust that your sense of justice will tell you that I have perhaps not failed to render you some small service in return. You will find in this letter a sum of money, which if, as I apprehend, you will not yourself accept, I beg you present to one of those institutions for the sick, which your knowledge of such matters tells you is most in need of it.

"So take back your promise given to me in the sierra, and no longer dread to hear of the death of DON Q."

Sir William Gasterton remained for a long time, his head upon his hand. "A lack of sympathy," he said at length, half aloud. "Well, it may be he was not wrong."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW DON Q. FOUGHT FOR THE VALDEREJOS

It happened on a day early in the following summer that Don Q. descended the further side of the sierra, where among the olive groves he purposed inquiring at first-hand into the particulars of a case about which complaint had been sent to him. Coming one evening at nightfall to a village, he decided to pass the night in the posada, which stood alone, cut off by a brawling brook from the other hovels.

Over the wall of the courtyard a single palm tree leaned in sad and ragged glory, for the inn had embedded itself among the ruins of what had been a spacious Moorish dwelling. It was a poor place, with no promise of entertainment, hence the brigand, riding through a gap in the broken wall, was surprised to see a carriage standing in the litter of the yard, while a group of villagers pressed staring round the door of the posada. From horseback he looked over the heads of the crowd. Within the doorway stood a woman in deep mourning, she had gathered her draperies about her, and her delicate feet seemed to shrink from the dirty floor.

"Can you not clean the place a little that I

may pass the night under a roof?" she was saying with haughty courtesy.

The innkeeper, a stout, insolent-looking young fellow, protested volubly that he possessed no velvet carpet fit for the *illustrissima's* feet, no couch of down and gold—here he threw up his head like a jibbing horse and halted awkwardly.

"May I offer my poor services?" At sound of Don Q.'s suave voice the lady turned with a glance of dismay, almost of terror.

She was plainly a woman of rank, and also still a beautiful woman, although her hair was streaked with grey, and a settled sadness accentuated the lines of her mouth.

"If the señora will condescend to sit in her carriage for a moment, this hovel shall be made as fit for her occupation as it is possible to make it."

"I thank you, señor, but I detain you, and the darkness will soon fall," she replied.

"My destination is yet distant, señora, and I proposed having a meal here on my way." By this time the lady found herself being led with all the punctiliousness of Spanish ceremony back to her carriage.

"Señor," she said. "I thank you for your aid, but I cannot consent to return to the posado unless you remain to dine there as you intended."

Once again Don Q.'s sombrero touched the

ground. "Will the señora honour me so greatly as to dine with me before I ride forward?"

So it was arranged, and the brigand returned to the inn for a word with the patron, who awaited him trembling.

"What insolence is this, Tobal? You refuse your hospitality to the illustrious lady?" He cut short Tobal's eager excuses of "much work, much trouble:" "Let all be quickly prepared if you would save yourself from punishment."

Doña Adonza in her carriage heard nothing of this interlude, and beheld in amazement the sudden-born activity of the whole community; they hurried, collided, pushed each other aside in their anxiety to be busy, and she concluded the hidalgo who had come to her aid must be a man of influence. Later their acquaintance ran on smoothly, and before the last dish was laid on the table Don Q.'s tact had swept away most of those small social reserves that hinder the ripening of friendly intercourse.

"I am thankful for your presence, señor," she was saying, "for I am terrified of these mountains."

"And why, señora?" by a mutual delicacy they were yet ignorant of each other's names.

"Do you not know that somewhere up yonder is the lair of the brigand, Don Q.?" she dropped her voice at the name.

"Why should that fact trouble you? Surely you have no fear of him?"

"Do you not know? He is a terrible person!" Doña Adonza shut her fan emphatically to point the adjective.

The brigand shook his head. "To his enemies perhaps he is terrible, but no story has ever reached my ears of harshness to your sex."

"He is merciful to women, yes; but believe me, to men he is pitiless!"

A stifled sneeze broke the silence. Don Q. rose quietly from the table, and opened the inner door as Tobal fell back from it. Don Q. seized him by the ear, and forced him out of sight. "Corpse of a scullion!" he whispered with venom, "what is it that I find you doing? Listening? Stretching your rabbit ears to hear? Back to your pans, animal! Were it not for the presence of this lady I would paunch you in your own kitchen!"

Don Q. returned to his seat. "Pardon me, señora, I fear you may have fancied I was angry. Alas, I have gone through the world supporting the cross of a perhaps hasty temper."

But Doña Adonza protested she had heard nothing, and the brigand resumed:

"We were discussing Don Q. Has it ever struck you that he may be a person of some culture? That he also may have his regrets?

Living up there among the crags, surrounded by none but barbarous men, do you think it possible he may sigh for days now past ? "

" I believe there is a tradition which declares him to be a man of breeding," she replied, " but it cannot be true."

" And why not, señora ? Pray tell me."

" Need I explain ? " she exclaimed. " The manner of his life— "

" The poor bless his name," interjected Don Q.

" True. More than that, they actually seek justice at his hands. Can it be that you know Don Q. ? "

" I think I may say as much."

" And you continue to think favourably of him ? " She raised her hands.

Don Q. waved the cigarette he had been permitted to light. " He has his faults—like the rest of us," he observed tolerantly.

" He is well born ? "

" So I should judge."

" And handsome ? "

Don Q. started. " I should not call him precisely—handsome," he responded, " perhaps distinguished-looking would be the more accurate epithet."

" I wonder then he should lead so—strange a life ? "

" Do you wonder, señora ? " her companion

spoke in a softened tone, "for I see you also have known grief—do *you* wonder, you who perhaps understand that destiny drives some of us with an implacable rein?"

Her pale face was stricken grey. "You say truly, señor, for I who speak to you was once as other women are—merciful to all the world. But not now! My life is broken!" using the pathetic phrase so frequent on Spanish lips.

Don Q. sat mute, his head bent, as he listened.

She went on in a low voice. "I had a son, he was my life—he was my all in the world. He loved me as I loved him. The future promised everything. Juan was capable, noble, ambitious—

A long and troubled silence fell between them. This vision of a shattered life appealed peculiarly to Don Q., but he was not prepared for the next words.

"I have lost him—lost my son! He was assassinated! And what is left for me? I weep, I weep, I weep!"

The poignant repetition pierced Don Q. He rose abruptly. "Señora, by whom was this crime committed?"

"By one who could use the cloak of the law, even that of the code of honour. Count Julowski is a professed duellist. It happened in Vienna. Juan, only that morning arrived in the city, was mounting the steps of the club; the Count,

coming out in a ill-humour, insulted him. They met at dawn. It was over in a moment. Juan was only a lad, señor ! . . . I was in Paris. I flew to his side. Alas ! he lay there very cold and peaceful, for the first time in all his life unanswering to my love. Juan, Juan ! " She stood up, and moved restlessly from end to end of the room.

Don Q., with fixed eyes, seemed not to see her. Then, in a scarcely audible voice, he asked : " This assassin—he still lives ? "

The tall figure in its sweeping robes of black halted at once. She turned her head to one side, as one who hears a sound and waits for its repetition. Then she moved slowly back to the table.

" Look at me ! " she stretched out her arms. " I am a mother ravaged by sorrow ! That crime is yet unavenged. My friends, all on whom I relied, have failed me ! There is not one man amongst them but gives me his pity, his tears, but not one who will give me his aid ! "

Don Q. uttered an exclamation.

" I have kept the sword of Juan," she went on. " I will bestow it on his avenger, for it is a sword of honour. Once, señor, it belonged to a distant kinsman long dead, but whose courage and chivalry can never be forgotten. Had he lived my vengeance would have been secure."

"Lady, may I venture to utter your name? I know it now. You are the Doña Adonza de Valderejo," said the brigand very humbly. "I have a boon to beg of you. My birth is not obscure, and I still can draw a sword. I lay it at your feet."

She drew back, trembling violently. "What is it you mean? You are noble?"

"Of the noblest blood in Spain. Do not ask my name; if I succeed on your errand you shall know it. Yet be assured your revenge rests in hands not altogether unworthy, and, it may be, strong enough to compel justice in your cause."

CHAPTER XIV

HOW DON Q. FOUGHT FOR THE VALDEREJOS—(*continued*)

After settling the dispute among the olive groves, in the patriarchal fashion for which he was famed throughout the countryside, imagine Don Q. setting forth by the Andalusian railway upon this journey of knight-errantry.

From the very beginning the adventure attracted him, and this for several reasons. First, danger was always his magnet; second, to his haunted mind action was the chloroform

of thought. He was never so apt to undertake one of his freakish escapades as when he had for a period been dwelling alone with his memories in the mountains, then at the moment when other men would have turned to grosser pleasures, Don Q. would plunge into some exploit in which he flung his life upon the gaming-table of the world, and played all comers for it.

These were two of his reasons. The third was as strong as either, for this mission promised to lead him back into a brief contact with those of his own class. "To hear again the music of voices I used to know, to mix once more with my equals, to pass an hour amongst those who can appreciate the turn of a phrase, even the bow of ceremony of a gentleman of Spain—these things I am inclined to seek, it may be rashly, but they are among the last pleasures of a very lonely man." So in his autobiography.

On the way he passed through the scenes of his youth, gaining views of weather-stricken towers, of cities still proud though forgotten. Not even a stranger can go unmoved through that land of memories, that passion-flower of the centuries, which now, after so many splendid and desperate yesterdays, lies broken at the stem by the lustier Anglo-Saxon hand.

But once through the passes of the Pyrenees, such thoughts dropped from Don Q., for he

possessed that essential quality, common to men of action, of purging from his mind in an instant the clogging influences of the dreamer.

In Paris he learnt that Count Julowski, who was famous enough to have his movements recorded, was to be found at Mont St. Michel, on the Norman coast. Don Q. hurried north, and, alighting from the train at Pontorson, climbed upon the roof of one of the diligences which at that date conveyed travellers across the viaduct to the Mount. So it came about that in company with a score of Jesuits on holiday, Don Q. bumped and jerked along the high road until the villas were left behind, the mainland began to recede, and the old monkish stronghold, church, and prison rose out of the vast foreshore of quicksands and shallows, a monument of history, with the white-lipped ripples of the advancing tide playing about its feet.

Blue sky above, and a salt wind swooping down to meet them, laden with the odour of weed, from the young changing sea to the staled earth. The air was full of the crying of shore-birds, and he felt to the utmost the influence of the hour, and was quite ready for the *déjeuner* of golden omelet that soon lay on a little table before the hotel door by the side of the narrow street.

His *vis-à-vis* was an English tourist in a

flagrant cycling suit, who, having finished his meal, was making play with a toothpick, and patronising the fresh arrivals.

"This animal is of a most offensive type," commented Don Q., inwardly, "yet I may learn something from him."

But the cyclist did not need prompting; he pushed his elbow half across the table in an easy attitude. "Making anything of a stay?"

"A day or two," replied Don Q. with a bow.

"Have you found the place interesting?"

"Well, personally, I don't take much account of cold stone; humanity is my study."

The brigand murmured his admiration for the other's tastes, and inquired if there was much scope for the study at Mont St. Michel.

"Yes, there is, just now. . . . Look at him!" The tourist grasped the edge of the table, and craned his neck to watch a tall man stalk across the cobbled street, and take a chair under the awning on the opposite side. He was a thin, well-tailored personage, in whose yellow face only the eyes seemed gleamingly alive. He stretched his long legs in front of him, cocked his panama at a more rakish angle, and, placing one hand upon his hip, prepared to survey the company.

"Everyone appears to find interest in this person. Pray who may he be?" asked Don

Q., although he felt already the joy of the hunter who has run his quarry to earth.

"That, sir, is Count Julowski, the celebrated duellist," replied the other, proud of his information. "He's close on his half-hundred they tell me."

In recording this conversation, Don Q. added this remark: "I find that Julowski's reputation has gone abroad in Mont St Michel. He forms one of the sensations of the place, like the ancient horrors of the Abbey, or those Chinese lanterns, by the romantic light of which one mounts the old stone stairway up the cliff to the annexes after dark. People are eager to stare at this stalking personage, whose only claim to renown lies in the fact that he has recently slain a fellow-creature, and may be expected at no distant date to slay others. Contradictory as it may seem, such a state of things could not exist save in a civilisation such as ours, where men are no longer lords of the sword, where the old-world arts of war and the strong hand have decayed, and in which folk live on a platform of artificial safety scaffolded by the police-taxes that they pay."

Don Q. was very busy throughout the forenoon; he went thoroughly over the ramparts, and all about the rock of Mont St Michel. He conversed with fishermen, waiters, visitors; he made himself

acquainted with the gossip of the little town; he heard much of Julowski; he threw himself several times in the way of the Count, but chance on each occasion caused that individual to avoid him.

Yet perhaps if Julowski, as he sat at the *table d'hôte* that evening, had been asked to pick out the one of all others present least likely to desire to try with him the arbitrament of the sword, he might have chosen the pale, fragile, bald-headed man, whose fastidiousness and gentle politeness had already attracted his attention, and whose assumed name and nationality were imparted to him by a neighbour at table.

Next morning Julowski walked on the ramparts. It was again a blue and glorious day of young summer, and he stopped now and then to lean upon the wall and gaze out seawards, where he could see the tide on its twinkling white feet dancing in across the wastes of sand. Over and about the moving line of foam clouds of shore-birds flew and settled, and flew again with faint shrill cries, and above all rose the shrieking clamour of the gulls

Presently, as he rounded the corner, the Count became aware of the slender figure of the Spaniard, also basking in the sun.

Don Q. faced about with a bow. "I have the honour to present myself to Monsieur the Count."

Julowski scowled. "I do not desire your acquaintance."

"Alas! that has unfortunately become a necessity, since I am here at this moment for the especial purpose of making yours," said Don Q.

"What do you want with me?"

"Believe me, my desire is not to meet you as a friend, but as an antagonist. If you will be good enough to name your second—"

"I have no such friend here."

Don Q.'s face cleared a little. "Neither have I, therefore our mutual affair becomes at once of the most entire simplicity. We will meet unaccompanied by seconds in the small wood at the back of the Mount, or upon the sands at break of day, when the tide will be far out, in the position most happy for our purpose."

Julowski's sinister eyes drew together. "I have no quarrel with you."

"A trifling objection to be at once removed," Don Q. replied, staring up at him with grimness. "Monsieur, your countenance displeases me!"

The deep yellow of Julowski's face was charged with fury, but he controlled himself. "Your opinion does not disturb me. I will not fight with you." He turned on his heel, but in a second Don Q. was again in his path.

"In the name of Don Juan de Valderejo," he cried.

The black eyes of the Count flashed upon him. "Another Spaniard! I will kill no more Spaniards!"

"As to that, you have already killed one too many. I also am of the blood of the Valderejos. Before you can keep your resolution, it will be necessary to exterminate us!"

Julowski made no immediate reply. In the pause the cries of the seabirds upon the foreshore grew louder as the tide approached. Noon, fresh, buoyant, joyous, seemed to poise himself upon the battlements with wide golden wings. But Julowski stood darkly considering the fierce face before him. "It was—" he began.

A burst of voices drowned his speech, as a troop of tourists broke in upon their solitude, the cyclist among them. They lingered talking in lowered tones, and devoured by curiosity to discover the cause of dispute which had evidently arisen between the duellist and the hawk-nosed Spaniard. Don Q. seized the opportunity to force Julowski's hand. "I repeat, monsieur, that your countenance displeases me," he said loudly.

The Count shrugged his shoulders. "You insult me because you aspire to enjoy a brief fame as my opponent in an encounter," he said

derisively; "but I refuse to gratify your ambition."

"You will not shelter yourself behind an excuse of such imbecility! Can it be that you are afraid?"

"My reputation forbids any man to believe that. Pah! I will not fight you," Julowski exclaimed, then with a glance at the tourists he added: "You are without doubt a knight-errant, monsieur, and I am desolated not to be able to oblige your desire for suicide!"

Don Q.'s reply was prompt. He stepped forward and struck the Count across the mouth with his sombrero. There was a rush and a hubbub among the spectators, half-a-dozen hands seized Don Q. and dragged him back.

"It's lucky for you I was here," remarked the cyclist complacently in his ear.

Then Julowski disappeared, and the incident was over.

CHAPTER XV

HOW DON Q. FOUGHT FOR THE VALDEREJOS— (*continued*)

In the darkness of the night Don Q. tramped his small bedroom, set high on the cliff, with steps of fury, as the whole episode of the morning worked round and round in his brain. What lethargy had chained his feet while Julowski stalked away amidst the nervous grins of the tourists ? He blamed himself, refusing to admit that he had in fact been stunned by the amazing discovery that Julowski could turn a deaf ear to insult, and reject point blank an affair of honour ! Never for an instant had such a contingency occurred to him as possible.

That Julowski should refuse a public challenge, and shelter himself behind his reputation, was a thought beyond the bounds of reason, and for the moment Don Q. felt his design in check. Conceive the position, and you will at once see that it favoured the duellist. He was known, he occupied a grotesquely high niche in the opinion of those at present about him ; whereas Don Q., as a stranger, had no standing, his well-attested bravery was of no advantage, as, for obvious reasons he could not declare himself.

Yet one thing was clear. He must force an interview with the Count before morning. The night was waning, but no tinge of grey yet paled the blackness of the horizon, when the brigand stepped out upon the small balcony of his window that hung high above a gulf of gloom. Lower on the cliff's side he could just descry the roof that covered the head of his enemy.

The scent of the sea marshes came up fragrant with the breath of the ocean, and the questing note of the curlew told that dawn was near. He lost no time, but turning back into the room, he kindled his lantern, and a moment later emerged on the ancient stone stairway, whose moss-grown steps led to the annexe where Julowski was quartered. The wall felt damp under his fingers as he groped his way down, and a chill quiet, sad as night itself, penetrated the thin air. Passing along a corridor, he saw a faint light under the Count's door. The Spaniard unclosed it cautiously, and slipped into the room before the Count was aware of his identity. Julowski had sprung from his bed and faced him. Don Q. cast a rapid glance over the gaunt figure clad in elaborate silken night attire, before he spoke.

"Although the men of my race do not turn back when the knife is loose in the sheath, it is not my intention to assassinate you," he said. "I again challenge you to an encounter."

"You will force me to kill you!" sneered Julowski.

"It is my intention that you shall make the attempt. But you will permit me to say beforehand that I am for you a somewhat formidable opponent, for I do not value my life, nor am I disturbed by your great fame as a duellist, a matter that might tell heavily in your favour. We stand equal. You do not know my skill, I do not fear yours."

"You shall be seized and punished."

Don Q. handled his revolver. "Does a dead man value revenge? If you will not fight me, I must kill you!"

The sentences shot back and forth like an exchange of blows. The black square of the casement gave a sense of height in the dark, of remoteness, as if they two hung alone between earth and sky.

"You are, then, an assassin!" the Count cried, in his strident whisper. "Hear me! By inadvertence I killed Don Juan de Valderejo. Had I known his nationality—"

You fear my race?" exclaimed Don Q.

"Not for their swordsmanship, nor for their gallantry, be assured, monsieur," replied the Count, bitterly, "but I will tell you why, since you desire the chances to be even in our encounter. Long ago, one who could foretell the future

warned me. In a vision she beheld my grave, and beside it stood a Spaniard with a drawn sword. If I fight with you, by some fatality this dream may come true. Hence I am handicapped by a fear—the balance does not hang level between us."

Don Q.'s fantastic chivalry took fire. "Courage is of various kinds," he said, "and I conceive myself to be somewhat of an epicure in courage. You will not draw your sword upon me because you fear. Therefore I propose that we make trial of another hazard. I challenge you with the dice—the best of a single throw."

"And the penalty of the loser?"

"Will rest with the winner. Come, let us throw."

But Julowski hesitated.

"You must decide within three minutes, or I will shoot you where you stand," added Don Q., and Julowski could not doubt the reality of the threat.

"Luck has never yet deserted me," he reflected. "Besides, the dice are mine." Then, aloud: "I agree—under protest."

"That is well. I see dice upon the table. I will throw with one, you with the other."

Julowski nodded. "There is also the dice-box."

But to this Don Q. objected. "We will,

with your permission, make shift with those tumblers for that purpose." He indicated a tray set with night refreshment for the Count.

"What would you imply? Am I not a man of honour?" The duellist's face looked bone-yellow in the grey of dawn.

"No doubt, monsieur," replied Don Q., politely. "Nevertheless, even a man of honour in the constant handling of a dice-box learns a little of its curves, its weight, its possibilities—is it not so? But these tumblers are equally foreign to the hands of both of us."

They stood one on either side of the narrow table before the open casement. The curlews were still crying, the first delicious breeze of day fanned their faces, a faint rose was beginning to suffuse the dusky air, and all the gladness born on summer mornings wafted into that little chamber on the cliff. It was difficult to think that death waited there too.

"We will throw together," said Don Q., and Julowski perforce consented.

A sharp rattle, and the dice fell—Don Q.'s four as against the Count's three. Julowski snarled a blasphemy, the blood surged to his eyeballs—he would strangle this accursed little Spaniard with his hands! But the mouth of Don Q's revolver stared him closely between the eyes, and mingled with the dull tolling of a

bell throbbing far overhead from the convent on the heights, he heard Don Q.'s soft voice :

" You are a man of honour, Monsieur de Julowski."

The sun was just rising above the horizon when the two men reached the little grove of trees which is all that now remains of that once vast forest of Scissy that in the early centuries joined the Norman coast with Jersey. A cold wind had risen, blowing in from the sea, but the promise of daybreak brightened the immense waste of foreshore lying towards the mainland.

A fisherman somewhere out of sight sang as he hauled together his nets ; the gulls, already on the move, sounded like an echo of the pleasant routine of life ; all the opening promise of day struck on Julowski's senses in horrible contrast to the fate that awaited him among those empty miles of sand.

Suddenly he thrust his hand into his bosom and pulled out a revolver. Swift as his movement was, that of Don Q. was swifter.

" Hold up both hands above your head," he cried, " and do it quickly, or I shall be compelled to kill you."

The revolver tinkled down upon the stones as the Count's hands flew up. On the moment Don Q. fired two shots in rapid succession.

With a scream of pain Julowski's hands came down.

"Brute! Animal!" he screamed. "You have fired twice through my right hand. Would you kill me by inches?"

"On the contrary," said Don Q., picking up Julowski's revolver, "I have now quite finished with you. You will never hold a sword or a pistol with that hand again. Henceforward you will be a tiger without claws. And whenever you look at your scars, you will possess a memento of the crime which you committed when you met with Juan de Valderejo in Vienna. I wish you, señor, a good-morning."

The rest of the story tells itself best in two extracts. The first from a prominent Paris newspaper. "Count Julowski has returned to Paris. It is a matter of remark in all circles that the famous duellist now wears upon his right hand a black glove. It is whispered that he has donned it in memory of one whom he killed, and that he has sworn never to remove it. It is, moreover, generally understood that the celebrated swordsman has made his last appearance upon the field of honour, and some even hint that he is often a prey to great remorse. The view of his past life which he now takes is reported upon excellent authority to be due

to the influence and conversation of a certain great churchman."

The other extract is from a letter :

"I send to you, Don Q. of the sierra, the sword of Juan. Remember, it belonged, in earlier days, to that noble heart whose name is engraven on the hilt, and whose deeds will never be forgotten in the annals of Spanish chivalry. Farewell, I will always pray for you through all the days of your wild and stormy life. ADONZA."

Don Q. turned to the sword, and drawing it from the scabbard, read the graven name. He bent his head above it, wrenched by a spasm of memory. For the name he read was that which he himself had once borne, but which he could never bear again.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH PROFESSOR JAPSLEY, F.R.S., PH.D.

IT was in the opinion of Don Q. a regrettable fact that his return to the mountains from Mont St Michel was attended with no happening of interest, but he had hardly settled down

to what he has termed in his autobiography, as "the dreary monotony of sierran routine," when a capture was made by his men, which he always considered as a milestone upon a road which ran broader than his individual pathway.

According to a computation made by the brigand himself, seven captives out of every ten gave way, in the first instance, to bluster. They boasted of their nationality, they alluded significantly to their consuls, their navies, and the paternal care of their respective governments. The man who had just been personally conducted into the presence of Don Q. by Gaspár and Robledo was no exception, in that he essayed indignant protest and threatenings.

He stood opposite to the brigand, watery-eyed, irritable, his big forehead white and glistening, his grey tail-coat drawn back by one twitching hand, his scanty beard wagging as from his lips there poured forth a volume of speech, in which such words as "outrage," "unparallelled," "dastardly," stuck up through the main flood of verbiage like rocks from a torrent.

"From all of which I gather, señor," said Don Q. gently, when his prisoner began to subside, "that you count yourself to have met with misfortune in our mountains? But I assure you many excellent men and some persons

of renown have occupied a similar position to yours and said considerably less about it."

"I tell you I protest against the outrage of my capture in the most emphatic manner! I am travelling on business of the highest consequence, and I demand once again to be permitted to continue my journey to Malaga without further delay. It is imperative that I should arrive there quickly."

"That is an unfortunate circumstance."

"Do you mean me to understand that you will not release me? I am in your power for the moment—but for the moment only. Still, so great is my anxiety to proceed, that I offer you £25 to allow me to pursue my way."

It was the first time such an offer had been made to Don Q.

"Pardon me, señor, but for whom do you mistake me?" inquired the brigand.

"I make no mistakes," said the prisoner, peevishly. "You are doubtless one of those footpads, who here in Spain, as in Sicily and Corsica, take to the hills because they have committed some crime for which the law exacts punishment."

"And so you offer me £25 to release you?"

"I might make the sum a little larger, perhaps."

Don Q. clapped his hands, and gave some

order to Robledo, who presently reappeared, bearing a large brass-bound book.

"You are labouring under an unfortunate delusion," observed Don Q., as he turned over its pages. "In order to correct this as thoroughly as possible, I am about to read out some entries chosen at random from this volume, which constitutes a record of my proceedings in the mountains, where I have lived, as the people of the plains will tell you, for very many years. For instance:

"'May 15th. Count von Kurhamer. Nationality, Prussian. Captured by Detachment 3. Ransom demanded, £10,000, to be paid before June 14th. Ransom received, June 3rd. *Note.*—It is strange that this young man's friends should have preferred to regain him.' Let us turn to another year:

"'Sept. 1st. Sir Graham Marks. Nationality, British. Captured by Detachment 1, while admiring the interior of the shrine of San Pedro of the sierra. Ransom demanded, £3,000, to be paid by October 15th. Ransom received, Oct. 13th. *Note.*—A very noble caballero, who made a charming guest. I may mention that Don Graham had the good fortune to secure some excellent heads of ibex during his stay among us. In saying good-bye, I lost a friend.'

"Now, señor, at a glance we will see the

other side of the picture. See, I open the leaves at a venture.

" ' April 28th. Don Luis del Monte. Nationality, Spanish. Captured by special detachment. Ransom demanded, 2,000 pesetas. . . .' There is here a little gap, señor, but the entry ends: ' Buried May 25th. *Note.*——' "

" Read me no more from this infernal book ! " The prisoner had wound his hand in the length of his thin beard.

Don Q. closed the volume and handed it back to Robledo.

" I tell you I am a British subject ! " exclaimed the captive again.

" As to that, no fewer than nineteen of your compatriots have been here before you," replied Don Q.

" But I am a man of some consequence to the world."

" I do not doubt it. And now that we know exactly where we stand, let me beg you to give me a few particulars to be entered presently in my business diary. Your name, señor."

" Shruppill Japsley, F.R.S., Ph.D. And since you must enter me in your detestable diary, pray write me down a cosmopolitan."

" But a moment ago you declared yourself a British subject," said the brigand in surprise.

" I am one—when I need a nationality. But

by habit and preference I count myself a cosmopolitan, for I am a scientist, and as such I belong to the world and the world to me."

"Be it so." Don Q. glanced keenly at Japsley. "And the amount of your income?"

"Enough to keep body and soul together after I have paid for the upkeep of my laboratory."

"The amount necessary to keep body and soul together varies so largely with the individual that I must beg you to be more explicit."

"I can assure you that at this moment I have but a couple of hundred pounds in the world."

"Then we assess your ransom at £500, a very low sum, believe me, for one to whom the world belongs."

"This is rank nonsense!"

"On the contrary, señor, it is excellent business."

"Am I to understand that your prisoners without exception pay ransom?"

"Alas! there have been exceptions."

"And then?"

"Let us not think of alternatives, which are invariably deplorable—in the sierra at least. We will not pursue this dismal subject, for no doubt if you write to your consul something more agreeable will be arranged. Yet in passing I may remark that owing to the observations

which you permitted yourself to make at the beginning of our interview, I have been obliged to double your ransom, otherwise it would have stood at £250. I have always endeavoured to meet the needs of my captives, but also I do not forget how far they have endeavoured to consider mine."

"But what is the use of keeping me a prisoner since I cannot pay you?" argued Japsley.

"An acquaintance with humanity has taught me, señor, that persons under your circumstances can command a good deal more money than they may at first imagine."

Japsley opened his mouth for further protestation, but, catching sight of the expression upon the face of his captor, he desisted, and began the important letter which Don Q. promised should be carried to its destination with all reasonable speed.

"And now that by the blessing of San Pedro these formalities are happily concluded," said the brigand, "I beg that for the next three weeks you will look upon me in the light of your host whom you may command in all things save one—the small matter of your departure from the valley."

CHAPTER XVII

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH PROFESSOR JAPSLEY—(*continued*)

ALREADY Japsley had spent many days in the sierra, and during every day he imagined himself to be collecting significant items of information concerning his captor's character. But sight does not imply insight, and, although Japsley was a man of trained intelligence, his intellect, choked with an accumulation of facts and theories, had become dyspeptically torpid as regarded the active conduct of life. Of the intuitive faculty, he had perhaps as little as can possibly be born with the son of woman.

He could not, however, fail to realise two salient facts about Don Q.—one that the brigand prided himself on being a man of his word, the second that he was quite immutable. Hence Japsley understood the arrival of his ransom in full was a consummation devoutly to be wished for. The alternative—which Don Q. had refused to put into words—haunted the brain of the scientist. He thrust away as long as he could the horrible speculations which burned there, but they formed the background of every waking moment.

The two men lived pactically *tête-à-tête*, ate their meals together, sat through long hours on the terrace or by the fireside, each sensible of the antagonistic mental attitude of the other. Japsley's conventional verdict did scant justice to Don Q.'s character, and of this the brigand was well aware. He could read between the lines of his companion's talk. He watched him pinning human units into classes and types, taking little account of their individual variation—that incalculable factor in the complex system of things. The man's lack of elemental humanity repelled Don Q. Propinquity forced the growth of their mutual dislike, lack of occupation fostered it until the situation became strained to the utmost, long before Japsley's captivity could reasonably be expected to terminate in the arrival of his ransom.

But one outstanding peculiarity about the scientist lent him an adventitious interest in the eyes of the brigand. Early in the course of their acquaintance Don Q. became aware, partly by intuition, partly by deduction from stray remarks, that Japsley either was not what he had given himself out to be, or else that he was something over and beyond it. The man nursed a secret, nursed it with palpitations of fear lest it should be discovered. It is impossible for human beings to live at such close quarters

without the exchange of small personal experiences. Thus Don Q. was enabled to piece together details of his captive's history, but at a given point he always came up against a blank wall, and he began to realise that this flabby talker had some hidden aim in his life.

His history ran much as follows. From a provincial grammar school Japsley had gone to Edinburgh University, armed with an exhibition ; by way of Edinburgh, and carrying a reputation for scholarship and ability, he had made a successful invasion of Cambridge, and from there he drifted—always laden with scholarships —to continental seats of learning. Later he had returned heavily charged with the wisdom of the Teuton, but refusing a chair at no fewer than three universities, he had devoted himself to "private research." So far all ran clear, but here came the block. Of what nature was this "private research" that had tempted a poor man to reject a life provision in order to snatch at a bare subsistence? Don Q. put the question. Japsley replied hurriedly in many words, none of which, however, carried amongst them any atom of real information.

In return he demanded of Don Q. facts about his life in the sierra. To these he listened certainly, yet he made it clear that he disbelieved many of his host's recitals.

So time dragged with monotonous foot, from chocolate in the early morning, till the sun swam overhead picking out the scene of the brigands' camp of weather-grey bottle-shaped chozas crouched under the gaunt cliffs; through the drowse of midday heat with its siesta fading into the mountain afternoon, and until the wild pines were crashing and gambolling in the wind of evening.

At length, in a lemon-coloured dawn, came the answer to Japsley's appeal for a ransom. At the end of a tortuous course of travel it reached the sentinel on watch outside the ravine by the hand of a goatherd, who had had it from a charcoal-burner among the cork-forests; he, in turn, had received it from the saddle-flap of a smuggler, who had been told to so deliver it by Don Q.'s representative in the white city by the sea. Don Q.'s intelligence department was always in faultless working order, its members highly paid for success, remorselessly stricken for failure.

The letter was duly brought to Japsley in the cleft of a small stick. £500 is not a large sum, he hoped nervously it had been gathered for him. But alas! he read:—

"DEAR SIR,—We have realised all moneys in our hands belonging to you, and inclose the full amount of £449. There is little doubt the

Government would make up the deficit, but, following your instructions, we have not applied for their help. Assuring you of our continued desire to serve," etc., etc.

Japsley sat for some minutes with the letter in his fingers plunged in apprehensive thought, while in his heart he cursed the parsimony of his agent. If the firm had only known, in a little time—a very, very little time—he could have repaid them such a loan a thousand times over. They, of course, could not realise what manner of man this was into whose power he had fallen.

Presently Don Q. appeared; the scientist took a last look at him. There he stood, fragile in body, in some attitudes almost grotesque, but it had for some time past been borne in on Japsley that this man was not as other men, and he trembled, recollecting his secret. Oh, desperate game, to be played out in the lone and houseless mountains!

"Have you any communication to make to me?" the brigand asked.

Japsley's lips framed an inaudible "Yes."

"Your ransom and your fine have, I trust, arrived?"

"My ransom in full and the bulk of the fine." Japsley added the exact figures. "The remain-

der I bind myself to send to you within a month of my getting into touch with the world again."

But Don Q. shook his head. "What warranty have I for that, señor?"

"I will give you any bond you like to demand. I must return to—to civilisation quickly; immense issues hang on my return. Otherwise you, amongst others, will be a loser."

Japsley's fingers were fluttering in his beard.

"I pardon the suggestion, which is entirely outside the province of practical politics up here in the sierra. Believe me, señor, if I were to permit you, a captive fallen short in your ransom, to leave me, my credit in the plains would suffer irremediably. Any future prisoner might imagine himself permitted to take similar liberties. No man has ever existed more averse from cruelty than myself, but as ruthlessness in prosecuting war is the truest mercy in the end to the world, so in this case, I shall be forced to make an example of you as—"

"Do not be blind to your own interests," urged Japsley, with shaking lips. "I pledge you my word of honour, no one will ever hear that I failed to collect my full ransom."

"Alas, señor, Her British Majesty's consul knows it—to mention one individual only."

"I will pay the outstanding amount twenty times over!" The moisture gathered coldly

on Japsley's expanse of brow. "Send another messenger—I will write again—"

Don Q. shook his head. "You told me your whole fortune consisted of £200, how then can you be certain of raising more than £449—which is already double that sum?"

"You will dare to take all this and yet kill me?" Japsley cried.

"By no means! I shall return this amount to your representatives, and upon you I shall enforce the penalty."

Japsley no longer looked at Don Q.; he could not meet those inexorable eyes. "The penalty—what is it?" he asked, the drops of moisture now running down his blanched face.

Don Q. glanced at his watch. "It is already five o'clock, by eight to-night you will be informed of my decision."

"You cannot mean that you will murder me?"

"Murder is an ugly word, but it is quite certain that, if I believe it to be expedient, by to-morrow you will have ceased to live."

Japsley gazed round the glen of the Boca de Lobo with the seeking eyes of a hunted creature. The moment was upon him when he must make his last bid for life, when he must part with the secret he had hidden with so much of jealous care for years, that, looking back upon them, seemed countless and all alike barren.

It was within an hour of sundown, and the blur of smoke from many fires rose, half concealing the groups in the bottom of the ravine. From his place on the terrace of rock before the cave he watched the preparing of the men's evening meal—how often the sight had palled upon him during the past weeks! But now, seen for the last time through the narrowing gap of life, it acquired a strained and vivid interest. The wealth, the actual concrete gold, he had hungered to possess might never be his! Throughout his career he had been far out of reach of poetical feeling, but now there came tinkling back to him across the years Rossetti's lines:

"Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been,
Though some call me No-more, Too-late, Farewell."

The words worked upon his mood. "Might-have-been—Too-late." Was this to be the epitome of his own career? How soon his brain, that now held a jewel of knowledge, would be but dead matter dissolving to decay! All the long years of research, poverty, incessant striving, lost! Yet in the dusk he hugged his secret closer—closer. To it and to its development he had sacrificed everything, absolutely everything! It had been a drain, and had strained all the humanity out of the man, it had

absorbed the vigour out of his manhood, and the whole world only held one thing as dear—the life, existence, continuance, of the vitalised matter known as Shruppill Japsley! He looked across at Don Q. He had long hated the brigand, but never with so inextinguishable a hatred as when he felt that he must presently share his secret with this ruthless creature or die.

"Señor," Japsley said at last, "I offer you £1,000 for my life."

Don Q. looked up with a frown. "You gave me to understand from the outset that you were poor, very poor."

"It is true, I am poor, but I am also a man of science, thirty-eight years old, and since I touched my twentieth year I have been expending my very life in—in research."

Don Q. listened, his eyebrows rising unseen under the shade of his sombrero.

"Now we approach the point," he thought, but he held silence.

Japsley wetted his dry lips, It was like the pang of death to tear forth this treasure of his heart and put it into words.

"Ten years ago I calculated that I was passing the foremost of my co-workers and venturing on unknown ground. In the course of this research I came upon a discovery of extraordinary value."

He stopped, absolutely without power to proceed. In all his forecast he had never dreamed of parting with his knowledge in such a fashion as this!

Don Q. waited. Then at last:

"Of what character is this discovery?"

It seemed to Japsley as if with physical agony he wrenched the answer from his heart.

"It is an agent of destruction," said he.

"Of what nature?"

Japsley spoke fast and eagerly.

"If I were to tell you," he said, "the formula of its composition, I doubt if you possess the requisite knowledge to render it intelligible to your mind. I need only say that ten men—five men—armed with my secret could destroy a host."

"And you will sell this secret to the English Government?"

"Why should I?"

"I understood you to say that you were an Englishman."

Japsley laughed with some relief. He felt that Don Q. was impressed.

"I am one—when I need a nationality. But I have long outgrown such parochial distinctions. I have emerged from the narrow kennel of patriotism. I am become a cosmopolitan, therefore I shall sell my discovery to the highest bidder."

Don Q. looked at Japsley very intently. "And with what motive have you told me this secret?"

"If you will spare my life I will give you ten per cent. of the amount I receive for it—in gold—gold if you will!"

"Ten per cent.?" repeated Don Q. in a slow voice.

"It will be an immense sum," urged Japsley, with wild eagerness. "See," he continued, "I will bide my time, I will wait till a European crisis arises, then I shall make terms—hard terms."

"Two more questions," said Don Q. "First, does this agent of destruction demand a brave man to handle it?"

"No, no," cried Japsley. "A coward need not fear to use it."

"Ah! And where do you carry your secret?"

Japsley raised his hand and tapped the dome of his forehead.

"Here," said he.

Don Q. rose. "The evening grows chilly," he remarked, "permit me to suggest a return to the cave."

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH PROFESSOR JAPSLEY—
(*continued*)

JAPSLEY followed him without a word. The brigand threw a log upon the fire, and sitting down beside it, stared at the little leaping flames. The cave grew dark, only that half-shadowed motionless figure like some huge brooding bird remained visible, and in Japsley's mind, as he gazed upon it, rose a terrible doubt as to the sanity of this man. Could it be possible—could it be conceivable that he would refuse such an offer ?

At length Japsley with his shaking heart could endure the stillness of suspense no longer. The hour had passed, and yet Don Q. sat on motionless by the dying fire. The scientist rose up noiselessly and walked out into the night. A heavy shower had followed upon sunset, and still through the evening calm he could hear the sad drip of rain-laden pine-trees. He began to wander aimlessly up and down the terrace, and, probably due to the excitement of the past few hours, his mind rose upon a rare and short-winged flight of imagination. A picture of the future painted itself before him there on

the gloomy cliff-side. He saw himself the courted of kings and ministers, arbiter of life and death to nations. Wealth was within his grip; all his life he had toiled towards that goal with singleness of purpose and a heart hardened against the appeals of humanity. Now—now he was about to grasp his reward! High rose his heart in that flight of fancy, the more intoxicating because so rare with him. And upon these followed other visions, cravings arose in him which had long lain dormant, ground under the heel of necessity, sacrificed to the one great passion of his life. Lurid were the dreams that came to him on the terrace, inarticulate, monstrous.

He was startled by the voice of Don Q., for a note rang in it that cut his fancy to ribbons, and left him once more face to face with fear.

"Some hour or so ago you were good enough to make me an offer," began Don Q. "I have taken time to consider it, señor."

"And you accept, of course?" Japsley was going on, but the brigand cut him short.

"No, I cannot."

The scientist put his hand to his head.

"What!" he screamed.

"I refuse your offer."

"But what do you want? How much? You are mad! I offered you ten per cent. Think

of it! For they will pay me thousands and thousands of pounds."

"I think it likely you would realise a quite enormous sum," returned Don Q., coldly.

"If you believe that, why do you refuse?" cried Japsley. "Come, I see it. I see it! I have not offered you enough? Name your price, then! Speak, man, speak!"

Don Q. regarded his captive with a baleful eye.

"You will do well to restrain yourself," said he, "and not provoke me further with your sordid proposals. Should you persist, I shall be forced to deal with you at once."

But Japsley was at a point of desperation. "I must speak," he gasped, "and you must listen! Hear me. Lives have already been paid for this knowledge. I watched my two old sisters starve because I could not give them help without cutting off supplies from the laboratory, and so much—so much was needed to test and perfect my discovery. Did any man ever make such sacrifices? And now—now at the moment when I could live again—when existence offers me something to enjoy—you—"

Japsley met Don Q.'s eye and fell abruptly silent. Then the brigand spoke slowly, with the air of one who habitually weighs his words.

"You have," he said, "according to your own showing, spent all the best years of your

manhood—you have broken the ties of blood—in perfecting a weapon which you intend to level against the human race. Had you done this with any high and lofty purpose, such as the cause of freedom and to aid the oppressed, or had you been impelled by patriotism, your action might appear pardonable in some eyes, perhaps even praiseworthy. As it is, I fear I can find no palliation of your conduct."

"What? Do you count for nothing the long devotion of my life to the interests of science?"

"Pardon me, the interests of science have had but little to do with the incentive to your labour. You have toiled for yourself! For money, power, or pleasure—I know not, but always for yourself. And you have told me that this infernal invention of yours will make a coward the equal of a brave man. It is individuals like you who kill out the manliness of the world. But Destiny orders all things, and, señor, I think Destiny has sent you to me."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot believe that Nature herself will permit you to buy a career of ease at the cost of thousands of lives."

Don Q. clapped his hands, and, before the scientist could speak again, Robledo stood at the entrance to the cave. "You will guard this captive, Robledo, with unceasing care, and

lead him when the dawn breaks to the Sabio Blanco. It is there, señor," he added, turning to Japsley, "that I will conclude with you this matter."

For a long day and night, and for the greater part of the day following, the party of three, Robledo, Gaspár, and their prisoner, wended their way upwards. At first Japsley travelled on mule-back, later on foot, but always in dead silence. He endeavoured to press his escort with anxious questions, then with promises, but he spoke to deaf ears. Two words only fell from the grim lips of Gaspár, as with a nod he indicated a mountain ahead.

"Sabio Blanco," he said, and fell back into dumbness.

Gradually with every stage of the journey the marvellous white peak rose higher and higher into the sky. The second evening found them on the high slopes below this towering summit. They had come by a thousand turnings, they had leaped rifts which caused the heart of Japsley to sicken even in the retrospect, breakneck gorges lay behind them, but at length, as the sun wheeled slowly to the west, Japsley descried, not far away on the bare shoulder of the mountian, a black figure which he recognised. The men quickened their pace, and shortly left their prisoner at the side of Don Q.

The air was very still. Japsley, looking down, saw the forests through which he had mounted showing as a mere blue smear far below his feet, above him hung the beetling white brows of Sabio Blanco ; and all at once the pitiless sense of distance, of remoteness, seemed to suffocate him. He turned to Don Q. with a sudden, dreadful shriek.

" You have brought me here to kill me ! You are going to kill me alone in this terrible place ! " he sobbed.

" No señor, I shall not kill you," the brigand paused, " though I do not deny the temptation to do so has been very strong. But I have overcome it," Don Q. ended with a sigh.

" You are going to release me ? "

" I cannot reconcile it with my conscience to do that either. If I permit you to depart, you carry your secret with you, and— "

" Then what—what—what— ? " Japsley's voice rose thin and vibrant.

Don Q. raised his hand. " I have said that Destiny brought you to me, for a purpose, no doubt. Here is your £449. I want none of it. This stupendous secret of yours raises you above my jurisdiction. It is an issue too large for me. Therefore I have brought you here, and here I will leave you in the hands of the old Sabio Blanco," he lifted his hand higher and

pointed at the huge snow-clad summit far above, "the Wise White One, who has watched generations of pigmies like you and me pass through their day on earth."

"Go on. What are you about to do with me?"

"Only to leave you. See below, where a bridle-path runs; it is the way to the plains. To-morrow you will be free to reach them—if you can. To-morrow—but not before. I shall leave a rifleman to assure me that you do not move sooner."

"But I have no guide."

"Exactly. So the affair passes out of my hands into those of Destiny. *Con Dios*, señor."

Japsley watched the little line of three men, moving away. At intervals he caught sight of them here and there in the windings of the mountains, till night fell; then he rolled himself in his blanket and laughed with a newborn contempt, for he felt sure that with sunrise to-morrow he could find his way to safety. The weather was clear, and had he not had some mild experience of climbing in Switzerland?

. . . . . .

Early the next morning Don Q. stood at the door of his little tent in a neighbouring valley, and looked upwards. The weather had changed, and the great white head of Sabio Blanco was shrouded about with mist. Some-

where in the heart of that mist he knew Japsley must be struggling with a Higher Power than his own.

As to the outcome of that struggle some say Japsley won to the plains in safety, and in his peril made a vow that if he were saved alive, he in his turn would have mercy on the children of men. A second rumour has it that somewhere in a chasm of the snows Japsley and his unrighteous secret keep each other cold and eternal company. Not Don Q. nor any other man knows with which tale lies truth.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW DON Q. KEPT CHRISTMAS

THE fact that Professor Japsley fell into the hands of Don Q. did not transpire beyond the countryside and never reached the outer world, but that affair was followed by one which for many reasons gained a vast amount of notoriety.

There are, although the matter is not widely known, a number of excellent shootings to be rented in Spain, more especially about the foothills of the Cordillera. At the period of this history an Englishman had become for the

third time tenant of one of the largest of these, called Lucharno.

Richard Warriswold was a wealthy squire of some renown. A great many countries had echoed the crack of his rifle, and he was well-known as one of the finest shots who had ever wandered out from the Islands of the Northern Seas. He was the type of man always designated by his full name, an insistive, masterful personality for whom "Dick" would have been an obvious misnomer, but who answered well enough to solid Richard. A good friend and an ill enemy, he marched through life giving much offence by his silent airs of superiority—with him a congenital attitude and entirely free from any suspicion of posing. This was the individual who with his daughter and a friend arrived early in December at the Andalusian shooting-lodge under the mountains.

"To-day, Ned," said Warriswold, a day or two later, "I fired a shot at bigger game than any I have hitherto pursued."

The speaker, a tall man with a close black beard, flung himself down upon a couch beside the blazing logs on the hearth. Into the face of his companion flashed a look of concern.

"What can you mean?" asked Ned Folwarth. "Larger game than you have shot in Asia and Africa?"

Warriswold glanced quickly at his friend. "Man is the biggest game on earth," said he.

"You have shot a man?" cried Folwarth, who knew enough of his companion's skill to realise that with this man to fire a shot was almost synonymous with to kill.

"No, unluckily I missed him. He got away."

"But why, in Heaven's name, did you fire at him?"

"I found him in my preserves. It was one of Don Q.'s scoundrels."

Folwarth whistled. "Ah, Don Q.'s? Richard, was it wise?"

More than a week after their arrival Warriswold came home from the day's hunting with a spark smouldering in his eye. He said nothing until dinner was over and Violet had gone out to stroll up and down the *patio* in the moonlight. Then Folwarth inquired of the sport. He was several years the junior of his host, but the older man had been his life-long friend, and it was the fault of neither that a stronger tie did not bind them together. But Violet Warriswold held consistently aloof. She was a singularly charming girl, devoted to her father, but she had discerned few of Folwarth's good qualities, and was very sure, in her own mind, that he was far indeed below the heroic standard she had conjured up as fitting for the man she might love in the future.

"Wise? Why not?" returned Warriswold, obstinately.

They say Don Q. has a long memory, and mostly repays in kind."

"What of that? Would you not have done the same in my place?"

"No; I should let sleeping dogs lie," replied Folwarth, with decision. "Don Q. has not bothered you, although you have been at Lucharno for two seasons already."

"Don't look so upset, Ned. To tell you the truth"—a short laugh came from Warriswold—"I believe that it was chiefly because of Don Q. that I took this place again. The very thought of catching him stimulates me!"

"Why not leave the Spaniards to catch their own criminals?"

"Because," said Warriswold in an altered voice, "I have learned that certain duties go with certain positions; one cannot shirk them. If people of our standing do not aid Government, we do wrong."

"That sounds very well," replied Folwarth in his quiet way, "but Don Q. is the last man one can expect to offend with impunity. You have harried his men on every possible occasion this year. And now, take my word for it, your bullet will come back to you one of these fine nights."

"So I expect."

"And Violet," said Folwarth—"what about her?"

"My dear fellow, why don't you marry her and take her away into safety? Here you have plenty of time to pay your court, yet you seem to make no running."

"No, I make no progress," said Folwarth, with the slight wistful smile that occasionally touched his lips. "I have, indeed, only been waiting for an opportunity to tell you that I give it up. I see very plainly that a studious, middle-aged fellow like myself, who neither shoots nor—— in fact, I fall short all round of the outdoor, upstanding lover who will one day become Violet's husband."

Warriswold turned on him.

"Middle-aged? Nonsense—at thirty-five! Besides, I'd like to know who is this upstanding lover?"

"Only the ideal lover of a young girl's fancy; when he materialises, he will, alas! materialise into a very different individual from Ned Folwarth I am afraid!"

"Why, you have liked her since she was in short frocks! And now you are going to desert us?"

"Not desert you," said Folwarth, smiling again. "But Violet knows my hopes, and my

presence only—only worries her. Richard, I cannot stay!" he burst out, with unwonted self-betrayal.

Warriswold knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Well, you can't go either until this business of Don Q.'s is over. You must be here to look after Violet, in case of anything happening."

"At any rate, take precautions. Get the Government to send you a company of carbineers. You will need them, believe me."

"I'll see to it. Come, let us join Violet. But, of course, not a word to her of this. Not, mind you, that she would be nervous for herelf," he added, with a deep pride in his daughter, "but it might alarm her if I were late coming in any evening."

Violet crossed the *patio* to meet them. She looked very lovely in the moonlight, her face framed in the soft lace she had thrown about her head. She slipped her hand in her father's arm. "Coming for a turn?" she said.

"No, my dear. I leave that to you energetic young people. Here's Folwarth ready to walk with you till the moon drops out of the sky."

Violet laughed. "How amiable of him! But I won't try him so far! This crisp cold air makes me sleepy. Good-night!"

Warriswold stood with his hands thrust down deep in his pockets looking after her, and shook

his head dismally. "Looks infernally bad that —for you, Ned," he admitted. "I can only say— "

"She deserves a better man, Richard. Let's turn in too."

CHAPTER XX

HOW DON Q. KEPT CHRISTMAS—(*continued*)

ABOUT the same hour away in the sierra a young mountaineer was urging his mule through the gorges by the light of the moon. His face was very colourless, and a bandage round his left arm told that Warriswold's bullet had not gone so far astray as he who sent it upon its way imagined. The wound although not dangerous was undoubtedly painful, and it is safe to say that had any but Don Q. held rule in the sierra, the man who was nicknamed Grulla (the crane) would have carried on the battle, which Warriswold's shot had opened, to a definite result. But it was ever the great brigand's custom to enforce upon his followers, by methods peculiar to himself, the necessity of committing no overt act of this kind without his sanction or direct command. Of the tenant of Lucharno he had once said:

"These Englishmen bring good gold to the

country. Let the Señor Warriswold enjoy himself. If later I should need him, I will send for him."

So it came that Grulla made his way painfully into the higher gorges until he reached the Boca de Lobo, where at the fires Gaspár bound up his wound before hurrying him to the cave of Don Q.

He went eagerly, confident of the revenge his lord would exact from El Ingles. He found Don Q. huddled in his cloak as usual, and apparently engrossed in examining a painting recently looted by the band. It was the work of a Spanish artist, and its subject a brigand of the sierra; but Don Q. found reason to take serious exception to many details in the picture, more particularly to the expression on the brigand's face, which he considered vulgar. So that it was in a very dark silence indeed that he received his adherent.

For a protracted half hour no word was spoken, while Grulla waited rigid and erect, but bursting with his news. Suddenly his lord raised a sinister eyelid upon him.

"Why is that your face is of the colour of tallow?" he asked gently.

"I have been wounded, lord."

Don Q. turned to look at the bandaged shoulder. "Who fired the shot?"

"El Ingles," answered Grulla, for so was Warriswold called in the foot hills.

The frown gathered more menacingly about Don Q.'s eyes, though his voice remained as soft as ever. "You will relate to me," he said, "exactly what occurred."

So Grulla broke fiercely away upon his narrative. "Yesterday, lord, it was my turn to watch in the woods of El Ingles, according to the order of my lord. As I walked through the pines I was overtaken by a great hunger, for it was ten hours since I had drunk my chocolate with Bartolo before daybreak in the upper ravine. Thus it come that I hid in the heart of a thicket to eat the black bread and the garlic which I took with me. Thereafter, lord, I rested a while till I was roused by the noise and cry of beaters behind me, and in front of me a shot was fired in the heart of the valley. Then, lord, I crept out of the thicket and was already running along the path that leads over the Ridge of Little Pines, when El Ingles leaped up from behind a boulder where he had been waiting for the animals which the beaters should rouse, and he pointed his rifle at me. But the woodguard that was with him cried out that he must not shoot for I was of my lord's following. Yet no sooner did El Ingles hear these words than he spoke against my lord, cursing him in a loud voice, and fired thrice at me as I ran over the hill; the second of these shots passed through the flesh

of my shoulder, injuring no bone, for which I give thanks to San— "

Don Q. threw up his hands for silence. Resting his chin between thumb and fore-finger he surveyed Grulla coldly.

" Imbecile ! How long have you been in the mountains ? "

Grulla's breath caught in his throat. " Five years, lord."

" And you permit an Englishman to discover you asleep in the woods ? "

" The Englishman is a very great hunter, lord," whined Grulla, apologetically.

The black look bent on him deepened. " You are ill-named, Grulla, for the crane is a wary bird," said Don Q. with slow scorn, " rather a bustard, for though the bustard be also wary, he is, as you are, slow and heavy to rise in fight. Your ineptitude is unthinkable ! Go ! Your punishment awaits you."

The man had turned away when Don Q. called him back.

" I am waiting for you to repeat to me with great care and exactness the words El Ingles cried out before he fired at you."

Twice Grulla essayed to speak, but such was his fear of his pale cloaked master that his voice failed him.

" You will delay no longer or I shall forget

my patience and deal with you as you deserve. What said El Ingles and the woodguard who was with him ? "

" As I ran over the ridge the woodguard shouted : ' Do not shoot for the sake of all the saints ! This man is one who serves the great lord of the sierras.' But El Ingles fired, crying out, ' I would it were Don Q. the vulture himself ! but this, and this for his youngling ! " and he fired thrice at me, as I have told my lord. Whereat Teo, the woodguard, was greatly troubled, and sent a message praying forgiveness of my lord since the fault was none of his."

It has been explained that against the Guardias Civiles Don Q. harboured no great amount of rancour. Their efforts to capture him lay in the line of duty, and their plans were, he conceived, even sometimes creditable to their intelligence. But against the man who, apart from duty, hunted him or the members of his band in the spirit of sport or of adventure, it would have been impossible and unnatural that the brigand should not have accumulated a monstrous resentment.

As he sat far into the night brooding over his fire, Don Q. laid plans to rid himself of this foe, who had now added unforgivable personal insult to the gratuitous and harassing enmity of the past two years.

It must be understood that Christmas was close at hand, when Warriswold applied for and was granted a guard of some five-and-twenty carbineers, whose protection he did not for a moment permit himself to believe he or his household needed. And in this it seemed that Warriswold was right, for the days passed uneventfully, the Noche Buena, Christmas Eve, had been a gay and busy time in the servants' quarters—new handkerchiefs for the women, tambourines and zambombas for the children, and quantities of turron, the popular Spanish sweetmeat, for everybody, had been provided by Violet, and so Pasqua dawned bright and sunny with no cloud to obscure the sky. During the afternoon the two Englishmen went for a stroll outside the pine woods, returning before dusk to make ready for the Christmas dinner, at which the young lieutenant of the carbineers had been invited to join them.

There was, it must be owned, nearly always some element of the fantastic in the projects of Don Q., and seldom was that quality more clearly shown than upon the occasion about to be narrated. The dreadful simplicity of the thing did not strike Warriswold till later. Dinner was already well on its way, the next item of the menu happened to be the Spanish dish of the season, *pavo trafada*, truffled turkey, when

a servant whispered a word in the lieutenant's ear.

Uttering a word of excuse, he rose and left the room, and nobody noticed the dish with a huge cover which was placed before the host. Warriswold, still carrying on his talk, moved his hands to take up carving-knife and fork, and at that moment the cover was lifted.

The contents of the dish drew all eyes. A little cry from Violet, a gasp from Folwarth, a dark look and a throwing forward of his heavy chin from the more formidable Warriswold. For there, surrounded by dainty dressings and sprigs of scented bush gathered from the campo, lay, not the turkey, stuffed, succulent, and dripping with gravy, but a large feathered vulture of the family of the *Quebranta hucsos*, from which no less a person than Don Q. had taken his cognomen.

Wariswold thrust back his chair.

" What does this mean ? " he cried.

" It means," said a soft voice, " that you two cabelleros will lock your hands above your heads. As to you, señorita I pray you to pardon me for the alarm I have been obliged to occasion you. No señores ! " Don Q. added sharply, " not a movement, not a sound, or I shall be forced to do violence both, I assure you, to my own feelings and I fear to the bodies of you gentlemen."

Warriswold stared round the room ; the place of his servants had been taken by a villainous-looking half-dozen of Don Q.'s followers.

" Your intelligence has, I see, fathomed my little ruse," said Don Q. with his deadly courtesy. " Three of your servants, and the señor Teniente, are lying bound in your cellar. The remainder are very convivial in your kitchen. The carbineers are also enjoying themselves as men should upon Christmas Day. It is true their quarters are within a hundred yards of the house, but I do not see how they can help you, for the bushes which lie between them and your door hold as many of my own men, each with a rifle in his hand."

" We have been betrayed ! " Warriswold shouted with intent, at the pitch of his voice.

" I pray you to speak more softly," urged Don Q. " If you raise your voice in this manner, and any come to your assistance, then for you and some others this pretty little comedy will become a tragedy."

Warriswold stifled the answer on his lips as his glance fell on Violet.

" Your diabolical cunning has placed you in a position to make terms," he said briefly. " What are they ? "

" Terms is neither an apt word nor in this case the correct one. My *orders* are that you, señor Warriswold, with your friend, will travel

with me into the mountains, where I foresee we shall find ample leisure to discuss the ethics of certain acts you have seen fit to commit."

Violet rose impulsively. "Father, you must not go!"

"Hush, my dear, your part will be to stay here ready to carry out any instructions I may send you," interrupted Warriswold. "Do not be in the least alarmed about me. And now, señor, I am at your service."

Five minutes later, the brigands with their two prisoners riding in the centre had gained the shelter of the woods, and far on the wind was borne to them the sounds of laughter from the quarters of the carbineers, the thrum of a guitar, and the song of one of their number accompanied by the beating of knife-hilts on the table which acclaimed the efforts of the singer at their revel.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW DON Q. KEPT CHRISTMAS—(*continued*)

The two Englishmen were borne into the mountains. The cold of the gorges struck at them with palpable blows, for both still wore only the evening dress in which they had been captured. Never perhaps had those forests and ravines

beheld a more incongruous procession than that headed by these two men with smudged shirt fronts and dishevelled hair ; their legs were tied round the barrel of their horses, while the animals were urged onwards by fierce mountaineers, who nursed in their hearts a savage ill-will against the captives. Last of all rode Don Q., his head sunk upon his chest, and a rankling bitterness against Warriswold filling all the courses of his thoughts.

All night they rode, and far into the day beyond it, towards the darker defiles of the sierra. At first they passed beneath cork-oaks and ilex ; then the cork forests gave place to scattering pines, and pines to stunted brush-wood, and finally the long line of men wound through bare and boulder-strewn ravines, until as the sun set, they entered once more a grove of pines, where the prisoners were thrust into a shelter of branches to sleep.

To follow the conversation which took place in the interior of their hut would not forward the reader along the line of this history. But Warriswold at length understood that in the pale and fragile brigand he was about to encounter a terrible antagonist. Next morning, as the sun climbed out above the shoulders of the ridge, Warriswold and Folwarth, still in bonds, were dragged out to judgment.

The camp of Don Q. had been pitched upon a floor of pine-needles, and he himself, still wearing the same immutable expression, was seated on a fallen tree. He opened the proceedings.

"Ten days ago," began the brigand, without preamble, "you, señor Warriswold, fired three shots at this man—stand forth, Grulla—who is one of my people. Is that so?"

"I deny your right to ask these questions," replied Warriswold.

Don Q. slightly shrugged his shoulders. "As you will. If you prefer it I will omit the trial and pass on to the sentence."

Warriswold was master of himself, and meant, if it were possible, to be master of the situation also. Yet it was one that required handling.

"I bow to your superior force," he said. "Yes, I shot at that man."

"Why?"

Warriswold hesitated.

"Had he done you any harm?"

"No, but he was found in my preserves. I, however, see no reason," Warriswold added haughtily, "to hide the truth that I fired upon him, because I was told he was a brigand, and one of your following."

Don Q.'s slender hand clutched at the folds of his cloak.

"Señor, for two years you have lived within

my reach. Have I molested you? You have been absolutely in my power; you owe to me more than you think. Few poachers have been upon the Lucharno estate since your coming, because I forbade them to go there. Yet that is nothing. You have consistently taken part against me, and aided those whose duty it is, perhaps, to harass me. That also is nothing. But what excuse can you give for your last insult? You have made it known publicly that you desired to hunt *me*—that you desired to kill me! Why have you done this?"

"Because I conceived it to be my duty."

"I am listening. Go on, say anything that may cause me to regard your action in a less unworthy light."

"You are outside the law," said Warriswold in his most insistive manner. "Now I, through all my wanderings in wild places, have striven to be upon the side of the law."

"Pardon me, señor," said Don Q., "you do not give your chief reason for this affair. You talk glibly of the law, but you omit the passion for sport which runs so thirstily in your blood. I very much fear you tried to hunt me and my people in the same spirit in which, as a big game hunter, you have hunted down your quarry. You would have been proud to kill me, you would have boasted and told the story

how you killed the famous Spanish brigand! Yes, you would have told that story over the wine and the walnuts. Well, señor, I will not rob the English of that story altogether, but it shall have another ending, one in which your friends will take a melancholy interest."

Warriswold stood silent, impressed against his will. And then the brigand spoke again. "You, señor Folwarth, I regard as an ordinary captive. You are a wealthy man, and I assess your ransom at £10,000."

"And mine?" Warriswold asked.

"For you I will accept no ransom, but the foothills and the plains shall hear how I deal with those who follow men as wolves upon the mountains."

"I will pay double, ten times as much for his life!" cried Folwarth.

"Your friend is no doubt gratified by your offer," said Don Q., very softly, "but all the gold of Spain would not buy his life!" He turned his fierce gaze upon Warriswold. "In the contest between us which you chose to inaugurate you have been outwitted. Now your punishment shall match with your career. I am told that you are a great hunter—you are about to learn some of the sensations of the hunted. Look well at the valley below us."

The Englishmen turned. They stood at the

head of a narrow, deeply-jungled ravine, perhaps four miles long; its abrupt, unscaleable cliffs shut in a strip of undergrowth, lentisco, ragged shrubs, and thorn interlaced with briars. Here and there a little brawling river gleamed as it caught the sun, tall grass waved in patches, and scanty groups of trees stood above the level of the brushwood. The place was so wild that it held a quality of fierceness, of menace, as if it would strike its own blow at a human life. Folwarth covered his face with his hands.

"The moment when Señor Folwarth's ransom arrives, you," Don Q. signified Warriswold with a faint motion of his finger, "you shall be turned loose at this spot. You will receive a quarter of an hour's law, and then my children with their rifles shall hunt you down through the length of the valley as they would hunt a noxious beast. There is plenty of cover there, and paths which your woodcraft will teach you how to find and follow. At the other end of the valley opens a narrow pass, twenty yards of bare slope leads up to it; if you can elude your pursuers and escape through that pass, you will be free. Have you anything to say?"

"Nothing," said Warriswold.

Ten days later, Folwarth's ransom arrived duly, and he set out on his journey back to Lucharno. Three hours after his departure,

the afternoon sun, slanting a little to the west, lit up a fierce picture. The hunters, a group of leather-clad brigands with scarlet sashes and gaudy headgear, stood rifles in hand, two among them holding each a straining dog in leash. More prominent still was the black-bearded, muscular figure of the man who was to be hunted, but the dominant note lay in the brooding figure of Don Q.

Warriswold turned to him: "Señor, these dogs—"

"Will take part in the chase, but in leash. There," he waved his hand towards the valley, "are rocks, brushwood and heavy undergrowth—cover such as animals haunt. You are free to seek their shelter."

"Without a weapon?" exclaimed Warriswold.

"You already possess the full equipment of the hunted—strength, agility, the secrets of woodcraft, and a love of life."

"How long do you give me before my pursuers start?"

"A quarter of an hour. Cut El Ingles loose!"

The big Englishman's jaw came forward at its aggressive tilt. He walked out of the camp to the spot where a thin track dropped sheer into the depth of the ravine. There he stood a moment studying intensely the three or four

miles of low-lying cover through which he must force his way. Then he let himself down over the edge, and to those who remained came the noise of his heavy footsteps crashing downwards through the stones and thickets.

But as soon as Warriswold believed himself to be beyond hearing of the camp he broke into a run, moving noiselessly, lightly, dodging branches, stooping, hurrying. He worked down to the stream, and, wading as far as possible along its bed, broke his trail. Then out again under shelter of a little grove, pressing forward yet husbanding his strength to take advantage of his second wind. But in the back of his mind all the time flared the picture of the savage company who would soon be racing on his track.

He was a man not easily daunted, but when suddenly there arose behind him the unison of dogs yelping and many voices raised in a cry, a spasm of feeling such as he had never known checked him for an instant. The chase was afoot!

Of all the sensations to which the human race is heir that of being hunted is the most nearly allied to panic. But to few men is it given in these latter days to realise its agonies. As Warriswold paused he looked up. High above him the sun foretold almost two hours further of daylight. The weather was cruelly

still in the warm hollow, and about him as he ran flies added their irritant to the total of his sufferings.

He raised himself into the branches of a tree, and, looking back down the ravine through which he had come, he saw the long line of his pursuers spreading across the level ground, on each side of which rose great walls of harsh and naked rock, cutting off all hope of retreat to the right hand or the left. Then Warriswold turned for one glimpse at the goal he was making for, where far ahead the rocky walls swung together, and he saw, like a slit between them, the narrow pass which meant escape and safety if he could win through it before the hunters overtook and shot him down.

On and on he ran, his heart battering against his ribs, his mouth dry, his eyes aching. Torn by thorns, tripped and scratched and blinded, for every twig seemed to take part against him in those straining minutes, he scrambled on, on, on. The one word rang like a bell in his ear.

Yet ever present with him was his master passion, and—it may be written to his credit—this was far removed from fear. Nor was it the joy of battle either, but went back behind and beyond that to a yet more primal instinct. Life he desired, and life must be won by his skill and his endurance, even as man had won

it in the days when man and beast warred together for supremacy.

He knew by the sounds that he had gained something on his pursuers, but the insolent sun still looked down upon his tragedy, filling the world with radiance and aiding the death which stalked him in the daylight.

The clamour of the chase was growing ominously louder as he plunged into the last mile of his race for life. It would be all a matter of a minute or two at the end, he knew.

His eyelids burned with the effort, the world swayed about him as in a nightmare, snags tripped him, where the thicket grew denser he floundered through it like a bull at charge; his labouring breath seemed to tear its way out of his throat. Now he was through the river, but close behind him swelled and rose the chorus of his pursuers. On and on and on he ran, upheld now by mere power of will. In the earlier part of his flight he had fixed his mind on the hazy pass far away in front of him, but at the latter end of the chase, distressed and panting, he began to divide the distance into shorter and shorter sketches. Now it was a moss-hag that he made his gaol, now a thicket or a tree, and ever as he passed each he stumbled on to fix his gaze on some nearer point, towards which he strained with bursting lungs.

The sun slipped behind the over-shadowing cliffs and a rush of dusk filled the hollow. By this time the leading dogs were not ten yards behind, or so Warriswold thought, when suddenly on the right of him rose an object, vague and dark, which began to rush aimlessly back towards the advancing line of brigands.

Warriswold caught at the chance, it gave him a new strength. This thing might check them. He heard shouts and shots, he neither knew nor cared at what, for now his feet were upon the hard incline, at the brow of which, assuming a hundred shapes, each more grotesque than the last, he saw the profile of the pass cut against the evening sky beyond.

A bullet bleated past his ear as he flung himself through its narrow opening, dashed on and fell, fell down and down through tree-tops and bushes—but what did it matter, since he need run no longer! The will in him gave way, and before his body reached the green couch far below amongst the lentisco shrubs, Warriswold was deaf and blind, unconscious of the world.

. . . . . .

Before the first glimmer of dawn Warriswold moved. His first sensation came with the stirring of his body, which let loose the aromatic scents of the leaves and shrubs crushed and imprisoned beneath him.

He opened his eyes in the heart of a fragrant darkness, and then slowly his memory crept back to union with his consciousness. Dim hillsides rose about him, clustered with pines, and above the pines an army of stars swung dizzily. Warriswold got painfully to his feet, aching in every limb, and like a man suddenly grown old. Then, gathering his strength, he staggered away down the mountain-side. Sometimes he fell, and dozed where he fell, and on waking walked forward. So, until the sun banished the stars from the sky, and Warriswold sank down beside a streamlet in which he buried his face and drank deeply.

Thus instinctively he made his way back to Lucharno a mere phantom of a man, and once there, without words, he flung himself down and slept like the dead.

He woke to find Violet bending over him.

"Where's Ned?" he asked.

"Why, he was with you! He is not here!"

Warriswold pushed up on his elbow.

"What! not come back yet? And you tell me I have slept for twenty-four hours! Why, he started before—in fact, before I did. Something has happened to him."

"Here is a letter, brought by a wild-looking boy on mule-back this morning. Perhaps—"

"Of course. Let me see," and Warriswold read aloud :—

"DEAR RICHARD,—I send you this by the courtesy of Don Q. I have met with a little accident, entirely my own fault, and am here—being a ransomed prisoner—as the guest of Don Q. He is a charming host, and I assure you I am perfectly safe. But let me entreat you not to delay your return to England for me.

"Ever yours,

NED."

Warriswold folded up the letter thoughtfully. "Do you know what that means?"—he cast a significant eye at Violet. "No? Well, I will tell you." Briefly he described the ordeal set for him by Don Q., and added, "And now cannot you see what that confounded ass of a Ned did? Why, instead of coming back here, he went in at the lower end of the gorge and lay concealed until he heard the beaters coming, and then showed himself to give me a chance to make my escape while they were busy with him—killing him as he expected. It is only by the merest chance he is alive. I say it again—Ned is an infernal fool!"

"How dare you, father?"

Violet's eyes were flaming.

"Eh, what? I say, the fellow's an ass!"

"He's the noblest man on earth! How can we save him?"

"He's safe enough; but—I thought you didn't care?"

"Of course I care!" said Violet.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW DON Q. WAS ASKED IN MARRIAGE

WEARY months had passed away, little marked by events of interest, when, as the year was again closing in, a series of unlooked-for incidents led up to one of the most curious adventures that ever befell Don Q.

Don Manuelo Moruno was smoking his eighteenth cigarette as he sat fiercely expectant under the broken shelter hidden away in one corner of the olive-grove. Now and then he would rise, and from behind a gnarled trunk survey with a long gaze the four miles of road, which could be seen winding down from the upper slopes and about the hillsides through the dark grey-green of olive-orchards.

His gaunt muscular frame, taken together with his brooding eyes and obdurate chin, showed him a man to be feared. He was dressed in the curious half-and-half fashion which his race often adopt when upon a journey. His swarthy

throat with its well-marked Adam's apple rose from the collar of a black coat, heavy top-boots received trousers of the same colour, and a large sombrero tossed aside left bare his lined forehead and hair shaven so close as to expose the lighter skin beneath.

Presently at the sound of a soft scuffling noise he leaped to his feet, and, peering through the greenery, he saw a small donkey ambling towards his place of concealment through the dust of the wayside. In a moment or two it stopped beside him, and from its back slipped a figure entirely in keeping with the wild and desolate landscape.

The woman, for it was a woman, made a slight, almost, it seemed, a sarcastic obeisance. She was tall, and through the rags that covered her could be caught glimpses of brown flesh; her eyes were coal-black, and her hair hung in long tangles upon her shoulders. She stooped a little as she walked, giving a strange suggestion of the pouncing attitude and attribute. But the face she raised to Don Manuelo's gloomy stare was elfishly beautiful.

"You are late. Have you done as I ordered?" he asked in a harsh undertone.

The woman pushed back her coarse hair.

"Yes. But where is the money? Then, it may be, the gitana will speak."

Don Manuelo shook his head. "I will give no more until this matter be well forward."

The woman laughed. "Is it not known to me that Don Manuelo, the major-domo of the illustrious Doña Engracia, he who formerly rode through the passes under the hat of a Civil Guard, had but small cause to love the lord of the sierra, Don Q.? But one cannot buy with an empty hand."

The Spaniard's face flushed blackly. "You are insolent because you have failed altogether."

"No, no; not altogether."

"You were paid to go into the sierra, and you boasted that when you returned again you would teach me when and where to strike at this brigand."

"Have I not done so?"

"Caramba! You have not told me where to strike him?"

"Even a Spaniard must know that he has a heart—as other men! Strike there!" she mocked, then shrank back, half-frightened. "Come, give me the remainder of my reward, and let me go. My tongue is locked."

Don Manuelo sat debating deeply with himself for a moment.

"Unlock your tongue," he said, and drew out a roll of paper notes. Slowly, with his eyes upon her face, he counted four, one after

another, into her hand, and, crushing up the remainder, he thrust them back into his waistband, "Speak!"

The woman moved away a few paces, sulkily pulling her donkey behind her, then hesitated and faced round. "For this money I have in my bosom, and for—another reason," her voice dropped, "I will tell the Gentile when to strike, where to strike, aye, I will even put into his hand the weapon he must strike with."

"Bueno! But if you deceive me, there is no brushwood in the campo thick enough to cover you and your tribe from punishment!"

"I have no tribe, for I am not a gipsy of Spain; my people are those Bohemios who travel down to the warm south when the winter winds begin to blow. As to deceiving you—why should I do that? Perchance poor Yesha has her own hatreds. Where is her man? He sleeps these two years past by the fires of Don Q., not at the side of his wife."

"What? Your man belongs to the band of Don Q.? Surely there is a hand to pluck at the brigand's life!" exclaimed Don Manuelo.

But Yesha snapped an impatient finger and thumb at the suggestion.

"Would you tell me that your man loves his lord?"

"In the mountains, señor, love and fear are

one. I sought my man in the mountains; he chased me away with blows; but when you have carried away his master, perchance my man will come back to me"—she pressed her face against the donkey's ragged coat—"perchance my man will come back to me!"

Don Manuelo had gained some slight knowledge of the ways of womenkind in his old policing days, therefore he waited silently for more.

"Listen, I would not follow my people when they travelled back to the north, nor dared I seek the barrio of the Zingali who dwell near to the city, for they would have cast me out. So with our little tent and the old waggon I have camped alone upon the waste land hard by the road from the sierra. Thus have I learnt that year by year Don Q. journeys down at this season to Cadiz. I have lain in the thickets and watched him pass. Aye, and even now as we speak the great lord of the heaths and the ravines starts upon his long ride thitherward."

Manuelo was up and moving at the word. "I comprehend. We must intercept him."

But the gipsy sprang at him and seized his arm. "Do you know my lord of the mountains and not remember that he is at all times well guarded? There is but one small hour when he moves alone. At the end of the week is the festival of Tosants (All Saints' Day), and" she

lowered her eyelids with a look of cunning—"but that is my secret. I will beg this year in the streets, and I will speak with him and lead him to my tent. I can do no more."

Manuelo shook off her grasp. "Fool! he will not follow you."

"Yes—because of a woman."

But Manuelo pushed her aside with a savage oath. "Go! You know nothing! I cannot trust you. This man loves no woman!"

Yesha crouched like a wild thing under his rough hand. "Hear me, nevertheless! For it is in my mind that when last the lord of the sierra rode into Cadiz, he carried with him such ornaments as Gentile women wear."

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW DON Q. WAS ASKED IN MARRIAGE—(*continued*)

It now becomes our part to draw across the page for an instant a new figure. The beautiful Maria Dolores del Lutoleale y de Vardelos had a face for which men in earlier days would have fought and died. As it was it drew many a caballero to walk in the nightly *paseo*, when

between the hours of nine and ten the fairest daughters of Cadiz moved through the wonderful streets of the city of the purple dome. But more glances might have been shot after Doña Dolores had it been known that she was a maid perilous, that the road to her favour was guarded by some of the sharpest swords in Spain. This knowledge would not have detracted from, nay, such is human nature, must surely have added to her charms. Here was a rose beset with thorns, a southern passion-flower growing in an old-world garden into which the bravest might not venture. But none of these things appeared on the surface, not did the noble youths who pressed round her imagine that each one's name and lineage were scanned by eyes of which they did not dream, but which they yet might come to fear.

Occasionally on the pages of history women of her family had risen far above the commonplace, that grave which engulfs all save the fortunate and the most unfortunate. The story is still told in Spain of that Lutoleale maiden at the shrine of whose honour a grandee of the King's blood died in the forest by the hands of Camilio and Adan, the two pale brothers, who flash across the page of history and vanish from it sword in hand ere thirty years had passed over the heads of either. Thus there grew up in Cadiz this

Doña Dolores, a dark flower nurtured in the shade of a convent for sixteen years, a vision at barred windows, but now come forth smiling into the sun and the moonlight, to meet in the white city a promise of the future.

It is not hard to believe that in the recesses of his heart Don Q. cherished old memories and regrets. The series of events which now carried the current of his life once more into the same channel with that of Manuelo Moruno had their source in a moment of contact with that past.

About the same hour that Manuelo, his heart filled with frenzied anticipation, turned his face towards Cadiz, Don Q. also set forth in the like direction. It would have been impossible for Manuelo to have chosen in all wide Spain a more efficient ally than the gipsy Yesha. Like a hundred other gitanas, with their high-sounding names and their rags, both a heritage of the black Zingali blood, she had hovered like a bird of prey, fierce but not uncomely, around the houses of the Cadiz rich, telling fortunes, pilfering as occasion offered, and in all cases relying for sustenance upon her dealings with them.

Few finer detectives than this can be imagined. Chance had filled her with a fire of resentment against the brigand, and it was chance again that placed in her grasp the single thread which

yet bound Don Q. to the old days. She had not succeeded in finding out the destination of the jewels he had in the previous year carried with him to the plains, although her hand was one of the three or four through which they passed on their way. But it has already been explained that each of Don Q.'s agents knew no more than his or her share of any business that happened to be forward, the matter in its entirety dwelt only in the knowledge of their master.

It was early morning on All Saints' Day. The last echo of the sonorous Latin blessing had died away in the great purple-domed cathedral of Cadiz. The lights about the altar gleamed softly, many women were kneeling before it, and groups of cloaked men stood in the shadows cast by holy candles. Over the whole building was sunk that air of mystery and prayer, which even in mid-day causes the wanderer through those great aisles to move with a reverence not untouched by the spirit of awe.

Dolores, yielding to the pervading emotionalism of the moment, trembled a little as she knelt with her old nurse beside her. I fear it must be owned that her presence had allured some of the cloaked cabelleros thither ; one in particular, with a muffled face, who stood in the gloom of a pillar, had, beyond all question, come with the

single purpose of looking upon her. Had the name of this man been shouted aloud, every head would have turned to behold him, for this was Don Q., he whose wild life and deeds had laid the foundations of a thousand legends, tales of the snow and the crags in the lonely sierra. Least of all was Dolores herself aware of the scrutiny of this man of her blood, who ordered her life from afar, and who, that he might behold her fair face which awoke in him memories of his youth, risked his life year by year as he would have risked ten lives had he possessed them.

The service over, the congregation filtered slowly out into the street, and amongst them went Doña Dolores; but as she approached the niche containing holy water, a heavily cloaked cabellero stood at her side. She met his keen gaze with her wide clear eyes.

"God go with you," he said softly.

"And with you," she replied, and passed on.

Don Q. lingered a moment under the doorway. He had never spoken to the girl before, and the answering spirit in her dark eyes raised a tempest of remembrance in his heart. So had those other eyes looked long, long ago.

A timid touch roused him. A gitana, with a gáudy handkerchief tied about her head, held out her hand for alms, and as he gave to her she whispered: "She whom you love is in

danger. Meet me at nightfall without the barrio of the Zingali."

Sunset was dying in a bar of sullen crimson low over the sea, and night had already trailed her cloak through the narrow streets when Don Q. rode towards the spot the gipsy had named. A heavy storm was blowing up from the Mediterranean, drooping clouds darkened overhead as he left behind him the phalanxed city, then the smaller and more detached houses, and, lastly, the quarter of the gipsies. Just beyond he came upon the woman mounted on her donkey, waiting in the middle of the road.

Without a word she turned and pushed ahead. An encampment of gipsies lay to the right, but to the brigand's surprise she avoided the by-path which led to it and held to her course along the highway. The two had gone but a short distance when the storm burst in wind and rain, swooping and battering across the levels. Once or twice they met with wayfarers making for the city, but as Cadiz fell further and further behind, they had the road to themselves. At length the gipsy diverged into a wild track which led over a heath, and suddenly in a dip of the ground there loomed up a dark, rain-sodden tent ; this, and a waggon, to the shaft of which a horse stood tethered, formed the sole objects that broke

the desolation of the waste. The torn flap of the tent beat about in the gusts of the gale, and Don Q. could see that a light burned within it, and that it stood empty.

The gipsy, slipping from her mount, signed to him to do likewise, and both animals, were tied up. "We will go into the shelter," she said, "where we can talk together."

She held back the flap of the tent while Don Q., full of disquietude and occupied with anxious fears for Dolores, passed into it. He had hardly entered when the tent collapsed upon him and he found himself struggling in its wet enmeshing folds. He fired twice through the canvas before a great weight pinned his arm to the ground, nearly breaking it, the revolver was torn from his grasp, and strong, nimble fingers felt over his body for his knife and other weapons.

Don Q.'s sensations were those of suffocation as the folds of the tent were pressed closer and wrapped about his head and body; next a rope, wound pitilessly tight, made all fast and sure.

As soon as he recognised its uselessness he ceased to struggle. To his astonishment, no single word was spoken, the wind raved, and the rain poured down, while he was left to wonder who might be his captor. It is needless to say that he was bitterly incensed at his betrayal, yet he could not blame himself for the

incidents which led up to it. The gipsies had always been his friends; some of his immediate followers were drawn from their tribes, and they entered largely into the composition of that intelligence department the excellence of which he made his especial care and pride. His first idea was that some wandering tribe had captured him by mistake. Such things were not unknown, and many a rich hidalgo had been tempted by these dark women into wild places of the campo, from which all of them had not returned. The method of capture, too, pointed to such a conclusion.

After a few moments he heard footsteps and the trampling of a horse, then two strong arms raised him and tossed him into the cart, which at once began to jolt away over the uneven surface of the heath. In time the easier motion told Don Q. that they had now emerged upon the high road; but whither he was being taken or by whom he was accompanied he could gain not the smallest hint; but as hour joined hour he began to conclude that Cadiz was not the objective of his journey.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW DON Q. WAS ASKED IN MARRIAGE— (*continued*)

SLOWLY the night wore through, and with morning the brigand heard the creak and groan of passing vehicles, or the soft padding of mules ; but even the " Go with God " with which the passers-by saluted the unknown in whose hands his fate lay, failed to elicit any response.

Presently he knew the sun had risen high in heaven, for its rays struck through the black tent in which he was wrapped, and there penetrated to him the smell of heated dust, mingling with the thousand odours that sleep amid the roadside trees and orchards of Spain. But still the cart rumbled on and on, and its driver maintained the same complete and menacing silence, while Don Q., unable to read the riddle of his capture, and worn out with cramping pains, dozed, now and again losing for a few moments the consciousness of his sufferings.

But by-and-by he was shaken back into wakefulness, for the jolting, creaking, and groaning were redoubled, and it was obvious to anyone with a knowledge of the country that the waggon had left the road, such as it was, and was blundering among hills.

The heat of the day waned, and evening had come, when at length the wheels ceased their complainings, the cart halted, and various sounds told Don Q. that the horse was being unharnessed. Soon he was lifted by the same strong arms, strong beyond the common—for the weight of a man combined with that of a heavy tent, could not have been handled with such slow ease except by the possessor of unusual physical power. He was carried for some distance, thrown roughly on the ground, fingers groped about the region of his neck, a knife was used, and a rapid slit released his head from the stifling folds of cloth.

For a moment he was aware of nothing but an acrid smell of wood-smoke; then, his eyes becoming accustomed to the light, he made out that he was lying beside a fire on the stone floor of a huge bare hall, while over against him stood a gaunt man, who stared at him with sombre eyes.

No hint of fatigue or suffering mixed with the brigand's urbane greeting as he recognised his companion. "So it is indeed you, my Manuelo? I have in truth often dreamed that we should meet again."

Manuelo Moruno was that most formidable specimen of humanity, a good man morosely embittered, one who had fallen foul of life and

became obsessed with a single idea that had driven him into the goblin domain of mania. His one aim was to compass the destruction of Don Q. Years ago he had made his first attempt and failed; after that, broken and disheartened, he had given up his post in the Civil Guard, but never for one moment did his thoughts stray from that single goal, and now—now at last Fate and Yesha had delivered his enemy into his hands.

"Yes, we meet again," he replied.

"I have by no means forgotten your oath, because, indeed, it gave me some interesting moments. If I remember rightly, you swore to kill me."

"And I shall kill you!"

"Manuelo, Manuelo, have you succeeded? Have you brought him here?" croaked a sudden voice from somewhere in the gloom. "Ah, he is here? Pray prepare him to receive me. But, Manuelo, Manuelo," with a rising cadence, "leave his hands and feet secured."

"We part but only for a moment," muttered Manuelo as he cut away the tent and outer rope that bound Don Q. and assisted him to a bench.

But the brigand, cramped and half paralysed by the long compression of his bonds, sank back almost fainting against the wall behind him. Manuelo, meantime, with a prosaic match

lit a dozen or more mariposas—wicks swimming in olive oil—huddled together on the rickety table, and these lent a weak smear of radiance to the obscurity of that hall of adventure.

Don Q. had already had time to recover himself, when, with a rush and flurry of footsteps and a clang of metal, a tall figure advanced from the wings of darkness into the amber light of the mariposas. At sight of it, the brigand with an effort assumed a more erect posture.

His visitor was a woman of great height, carrying herself majestically. A robe of tarnished cloth of gold swept behind her, an ancient corselet of steel gleamed upon her breast, her big, straggling features grimaced from the open visor of a helmet, and in her hand she held a boar spear, evidently taken from among the trophies which hung upon the wall. The only chair the cavernous hall contained stood directly opposite to the bench where Don Q. lay. On this chair the lady disposed herself and her draperies with an eye to effect, and immediately broke into fit after fit of giggling laughter.

The brigand watched her, and the idea shot across his brain that there was but one lady in Spain who could answer to the description of her who sat before him, the señorita Doña Engracia de Terente. If so, this was the castle of Terente, a remote and ruinous stronghold

in the centre of vast estates from which most of the tenants had fled terror-stricken.

"You have come at last, illustrious one," the lady said graciously. "At last you behold me!"

Don Q. never omitted the full tribute of courtesy to a lady. "I am highly honoured," he murmured.

"Be content, noble señor," she reassured him; "this is but a beginning."

"But why am I here in bonds, lady?"

"I will cut them with my own hand—after a word or two with you. You have guessed—you must assuredly have guessed—why I sent for you."

"You sent for me? Indeed, I imagined that Manuelo—"

"Manuelo?" she repeated angrily; "he is but my major-domo. I intrusted him with this supreme errand." She rose, clattered the butt of the spear on the stones, and, holding it upright at arm's length, resumed her stately manner. "You are about to marry me."

Don Q.'s life had been one of surprises, but it is unlikely that any former surprise quite rivalled this.

"Words fail me," he began. "I had not thought my personal charms—"

"These details are beside the question," she

cried. "You are King of the Mountains, therefore I have chosen you to be my consort. Royal marriages are made every year without affection on either side; with us"—she softened to an instant's coyness—"that may not be true. But on the higher ground of state-craft the alliance I propose to you will benefit both of us—and Spain will rejoice, for we shall be a new Ferdinand and Isabella."

"I am at a disadvantage," said Don Q. gently, "while discussing this matter in bonds."

"You can free yourself by speaking one word."

"And that word?"

"Is your promise to wed me."

For a moment temptation assailed Don Q. He saw he was dealing with a woman of unhinged mind, yet some chivalrous instinct would not permit him to lie to her. "In that case, señorita, I fear I must remain as I am," he said.

"But why?" she cried. "I am not without a fitting dowry. Hundreds of peasants till my lands, and my family is, as you must know, one of the most noble and wealthy in Andalucia, or even in Spain."

"Believe me, I recognise the honour you do me, but I am no longer a young man; also I am broken with many sorrows."

"I will comfort you," put in Doña Engracia alertly. "You accept?"

"Alas! I must deny myself that felicity."

"You surely cannot refuse," she cried.

"With a thousand apologies," said Don Q.

Doña Engracia sprang towards him, and for a moment Don Q. thought she meant to end the matter then and there with the spear she carried. But suddenly into her mad brain swept some new colour of purpose, for she seized Don Q. with both hands and began to drag him across the floor of the hall.

"Do not inconvenience yourself, I beg of you," said Don Q. "I am willing to follow wherever you desire to take me."

"That is well," replied Doña Engracia, and she loosened the cords on his ankles; then, holding a mariposa in one hand, she drove him before her from the hall into a dark passage. They had advanced some way along this when she stooped and whispered in his ear: "Run forward; save yourself! For here is Manuelo, who would slay you. Fly, that is the way of escape!"

Don Q. began a sentence of thanks as he ran forward, but it was never ended, for the ground seemed suddenly cut off from under his feet, and this sensation was followed by a horror of falling through darkness. He landed on a mass

of decaying straw, and above him he fancied he heard the woman's cackle of maniac laughter.

Don Q., dazed by his fall of twenty feet or more, did not know how long a time had passed when he came sufficiently to himself to take stock of his surroundings. These appeared to consist chiefly of thick gloom, the foul straw which had more or less broken his fall, and the slimy wall with which he came into violent contact as soon as he began to move. His first feeling on bumping against it was, however, far from being one of chagrin, for the surface of the stone was so uneven that he at once commenced to fray away the knots which bound his hands.

This was not done in a hurry, but at length they were free, and he hastened to rid himself of the cords that still hung about his ankles.

He was waiting to allow the blood to circulate in his limbs before starting on a systematic examination of his dungeon, which perhaps was destined to be the stone sheath in which the blade of his life must rust and perish, when a slight rustle as of a rat running over the straw arrested him. He stood listening, and could just detect the breathing of the creature which shared his prison. There followed a moment of silence, and then an irrepressible groan broke on the air.

"Who is there?" said Don Q.

"You?" the answering voice rose in a hoarse cry of exultation. "I do not resent death any longer since I shall die in the cage where the *Quebranta huesos* must die also!"

"How came you here, Manuelo?" questioned the brigand.

"It matters nothing now if you know the whole story," replied Manuelo. "I believed she hated you when she gave me money to bribe the gipsy. I thought she would help me to slay you—to pluck out your life—"

"You will be good enough to speak with civility," interposed Don Q., "or I shall force you to do so."

Manuelo groaned again. "An hour ago I could have crushed you, but now—"

"What has happened?"

"I spoke to the señorita of your capture, and described how we should put an end to your life after she had had speech with you. Then I learned I had mistaken her desires. Far from slaying you, she meant to marry you. Thus, when I spoke of killing you, in her wrath she thrust violently at me with her spear, wounding me so that I fell backwards into this dungeon, for secretly she had opened the trap-door to betray me. She is, in truth, of a great cunning. Ah! I suffer! This madwoman has

broken my back I cannot move, I hardly breathe."

"Perhaps a change of position would ease you."

"No; do not touch me. Let me die. But. oh, how can I die in this darkness? Give me light!"

"I have some dry matches; I will light one," said Don Q., his heart relenting at the sound of the broken voice.

"Señor, you can do more than that. Feel along the wall, and you will come upon some barrels, on one of which you will find a lantern, Kindle it, I beseech you, that I may see the light."

Guiding himself by the wall, Don Q. reached the barrels of which Manuelo spoke.

"Quick! Have you found them?" murmured the faint voice. "Hasten, for the love of the saints! or I shall die in the darkness."

Don Q.'s groping hand overset the lantern, but he picked it up and laid a match to the wick, which was upheld by a mere film of candle. It could burn only two or three minutes at the most, but he hoped it might comfort the dying man. First the flame glowed red and bulbous, then it flared slowly up to a yellow core, melting the denseness of the gloom, and showing Don Q. something of his prison.

The place was almost circular, and much larger than he expected, being some fifteen feet in diameter. The roof curved inwards, but the lantern's light was too feeble to show the position of the trap-door far above. Four or five small casks were grouped at one side, and half sunk in the filthy straw where he had rolled after his fall, lay Manuelo, his face ghastly pale, a blood clot gathered on his forehead, but his wild eyes burning like stars.

Don Q. would have advanced towards him, but he groaned out: "Stay where you are, I have a few words to say to you. . . . For many years I have tried to capture you, and it has always been my prayer that I might buy your life with my own. That has been granted to me. I begged for light, and you gave it with your own hand." He strained up his head. "I wanted a light by which to aim at the barrels, for they are full of powder!" He plucked a revolver from the straw and took aim.

The brigand flung himself face down behind an angle as the shot rang out. Instantly the place was filled with the thunder and the shock of two almost simultaneous explosions. Manuelo's last cry died in their roar. Don Q. lay stunned; but although the solid masonry was torn, owing to that strange arbitrariness

of action so often exhibited by explosives, he was left otherwise uninjured.

A screeching that shook the echoes roused him into palpitating consciousness. "Manuelo, Manuelo! what have you done? How dare you continue to be silent? Have you slain the great lord whom I love? Let me but find his body, and I will build for it a mausoleum on the summit of the highest peak and mourn for him all my life! But as for you, vile spawn of Murcia! you I shall torture!"

Doña Engracia's curses fell unheeded upon the dead ears of her major-domo; but Don Q., at the sound, raised himself, and with still bewildered senses gazed about him. And then he saw something that made him stagger to his feet. For where the powder casks had rested against the wall there now showed a soft luminance of sky, and through the broken stonework four stars looked in upon him with calm and friendly eyes.

Moving with the greatest caution, he made his way through the *débris* of masonry to the aperture in the wall, over which hung a huge stone that the slightest touch must dislodge. To pass under it was to risk his life.

"Better be crushed to death by her castle than live to be embraced by the chatelaine?" he told himself grimly, as he slipped through

the opening and dropped upon the tangled vegetation of the slope below.

He paused for a moment and looked up. Above him towered the dark curtain-wall to the battlements, and in the dimness it was hard to tell where the stone ended and the sky began. A single light shone out through a high window, the only one which redeemed the vast and solitary pile from absolute gloom.

As he gazed, the casement opened, but Don Q. did not wait to see who it was that looked out into the night. He turned, and, with a prayer of gratitude to San Pedro of the sierra, he ran swiftly beyond reach of pursuit through a wood of young trees.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW DON Q. BECAME A SQUIRE OF DAMES

MUCH that is set down in the autobiography of Don Q. can never be given to the public, for indeed the full history of the years he spent in the seclusion of the sierra would make a strange volume. It is only possible to choose those incidents which by some freak of chance throw light upon one or other of the singularly dissimilar facets of his character.

It was early morning, and Ingham, the British and acting American consul, was sitting in his office, that overlooked the white town which was the scene of his activities, and the dark blue Spanish sea beyond it. Three times he had essayed the report that lay before him, and on each occasion had laid down his pen and wandered away into anxious thinking upon the matter in hand.

Ingham was a slight grey man, with outstanding ears and a frowning habit of listening. He was credited with possessing a more categorical knowledge of Don Q.'s methods than any other man of official standing in the Peninsula. Nor was this to be wondered at, seeing that it had seldom been his fate to send a single report to headquarters from which the name of the brigand was entirely absent. Nor did the present one form an exception. He was retelling the now-familiar story of capture, but never before had any case included the peculiarity which added poignancy to this affair, and which had given the consul so many unhappy days and nights since the demand for ransom had reached him. A week earlier a letter had been thrown through his window, informing him that a large sum must be sent immediately to the mountains as a ransom for the persons of two American ladies, the señora Lintner and her daughter, who had been captured by Don Q.

During his many years of acquaintance with the procedure of Don Q. the consul had never known the brigand to seize or to demand ransom for any save members of the sterner sex. So that while the press of two continents buzzed with details, Ingham found himself continually lost in speculation as to the meaning of this new departure. He was by nature a conservative man, and all changes troubled him.

Thus he sat in his office, the walls of which had so often heard the narratives of the various released captives of Don Q., and wrote with minute care; occasionally his eyes wandered to the sea dotted with the sails of fishing-boats aglow in the rising sun; occasionally he drew inspiration from a large map of the sierras Morena and Nevada, which hung beside his stove, as, true to the traditions of his service, he tried to clothe a romantic incident in the dryest and baldest of language. He had just embarked upon a prosy sentence, when there came a knock at the door, that was opened at once from outside, and without waiting for an invitation to enter, a Spanish priest in blue spectacles stood bowing at the opening.

Ingham raised his head sharply. "I gave orders that I was engaged, and did not wish to be disturbed. I am sorry, father, that I must ask you to postpone your visit."

But the priest shut the door behind him with a firm hand, and advanced into the room, his sombrero pressed against the breast of his cassock, and his tonsured head bowed low above it in courteous deprecation.

"I infinitely regret, señor, but my business is of a nature that will not brook an instant's delay," and he stood waiting.

Ingham's habitual frown deepened; he had a great idea of the dignity attaching to the representative of Great Britain, but even he could not avoid being impressed by this priest's air of breeding and command.

He waved his hand to a seat. "May I ask your name, father?"

"My business is for the moment more important. It is connected with the affair of the señora Lintner and her daughter."

"Who have been captured by Don Q.?" added Ingham.

"Pardon me. Who are said to have been captured by Don Q.," amended the other.

"You are a Spaniard, father; but have you lived much in this country?"

The padre opened and shut his hand with a slight inclusive gesture. "All my life," he said.

"If that be so, may I ask you if you can recall any instance of holding to ransom which was not one of Don Q.'s achievements?"

"But very few, I confess. Yet pray allow me in my turn to ask you a question. You have held this office for many years, and not ten consecutive months of any of those years can have passed without your having had business dealings with Don Q. Have you ever known him take a woman prisoner?"

Ingham leant back in his chair, with his thoughtful frown. "No; the capture of Mrs Lintner and her daughter is the only occasion of which I have official knowledge."

"Or unofficial," said the priest, with some warmth. "Then pray, señor, how can you reconcile his present action with such a past?"

The British consul frowned at the paper before him. "Don Q.'s singular courtesy to women has always been the most paradoxical trait in his character. . . . I suppose that he is now growing old, and that his needs press more heavily upon him," he said hesitatingly. "He may, like the man-eating tiger, have fallen in his growing feebleness to make a prey of easier victims."

"Señor, can it be possible that you hold that opinion?"

"Certainly I do," replied Ingham; "it is the only supposition which covers the facts."

"Then you think he is no longer capable of those great exploits for which he was famed?

For instance, have you never feared that he might come and seize you here in your own office ? "

Ingham permitted himself to look amused. " No," he said, " for that would be quite impossible ! "

" Señor, will you be good enough to strike upon your bell for your clerk," said his visitor.

Ingham was surprised ; he read annoyance in this abrupt farewell. He touched the bell sharply, then rose and bowing stiffly to the stranger resumed his seat and his work. When the door opened, he spoke, without raising his eyes, " Esteban, show this gentleman the way to the street." Having said this, he went on writing, but as no sound of movement followed his order, he glanced up again with some impatience. The sight which challenged him caused him to start back. A huge, gnarled fellow, whom he had never seen before, stood scowling upon the threshold.

" What is the meaning of this ? " he cried. " Who are you ? "

The man made no reply, but evidently waited upon the stranger's bidding.

" You can go, Gaspar," said that personage, in a gentle voice ; and when the door closed he added : " An unprepossessing fellow, señor. I apologise for his startling you. Had I known

it would be necessary to call him in, I should have been careful to have provided the most presentable of the half-dozen of my men who are at this moment admiring the shrubs in your patio."

"Then you are Don Q.!" exclaimed Ingham, springing from his chair, and making a rush for the window looking into the street.

But in a twinkling Don Q. was before him, with raised hand. "Pray return to your seat, señor, or I may be forced to deal with you in a manner which, I am sure, we should later mutually regret."

Ingham stared at the hawk nose, the fiery eyes, from which the smoked glasses had been removed, the delicate, somewhat grotesque form, with its amazing swiftness of movement. These things, joined to the courteous manners of his visitor, all pointed to one conclusion. The brigand, as if reading his thoughts, made a slight inclination of his head. "Señor, allow me the honour of presenting myself to you under my *nom-de-guerre* (shall we say?) of Don Q. Let us now resume our discussion as good friends."

Ingham sank back into his place by the table. "Are you aware," he said, "of the risk you are running?"

"Perfectly," replied the brigand, with some sadness. "There is a price upon my head, and the first carbineer or *civile* who chanced to

recognise me would no doubt attempt to shoot me on sight. I venture now to hope, señor, that you no longer do me the injustice to believe that I have relinquished the high standard of my whole career, or that I have had anything to do with the capture of these American ladies ? "

Ingham hesitated judicially. " Can you prove it ? "

" But easily. Since I am here at the risk of my life to offer you my aid in the matter ! "

" One moment," said the consul, and, taking a piece of paper from under a weight on his desk, he passed it to Don Q. " How do you explain that ? " he said.

The brigand read it aloud :

" To the senor Don Ricardo Ingham—

" We, the bandoleros of the sierra, have captured two ladies, the señora Lintner and her daughter. We demand a ransom of £3,000 for each of the women. A man on a black horse will be on the bridle-path that leads to the shrine of San Juan on this day of next week. If any attempt is made to seize our messenger, or if the ransom does not arrive in good time, both prisoners will immediately be put to death.

Don Q."

" A very clear communication," commented Ingham.

Don Q. leaped to his feet. " Did you actually

believe, señor, that it was I—I who wrote this ? " He tapped the paper with his cane.

" If it be a forgery, who did write it ? "

" I do not know yet."

" But you will find out ? "

" Be quite sure that I will," replied Don Q., a savage energy vitalised his slender figure. " On what day will the ransom fall due ? "

The old careworn expression flashed back over the consul's face. " To-day," he said, " and there you have the horror of it, for I have, so far, only received four thousand of the amount "—he touched unconsciously a sealed packet that lay close beside him—" and I have now no time left to collect more."

" That will be sufficient," said Don Q. as with a rapid action he took up the envelope from the table.

Ingham jumped to his feet, and found himself face to face with the muzzle of Don Q.'s revolver.

" What does this mean ? " he cried.

" It means, señor," said Don Q., " that I will now take over the conduct of this affair, and since I am to help you, you must permit me to act as your messenger."

" This course is most unorthodox," protested Ingham.

" But I trust it will on that account," replied the brigand, " be none the less efficacious."

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW DON Q. BECAME A SQUIRE OF DAMES— (*continued*)

Don Q. had been riding fast for several hours, but he was light and wiry, and fatigue seemed to have no power over the iron sinews of his small frame. Already he was far upon the tree darkened bridle-path that would take him within easy distance of his destination. All day his mind had worked back and forth upon the problem of his mission. All day he had been filled with an extraordinary resentment against those who had committed what he considered to be a most monstrous crime. That they should have captured women was enough, but that they should have done this atrocious act under cover of his own name was an injury to his high reputation which it was not in the nature of the brigand to forgive. He was perforce acquainted with many of the shady characters of Spain, yet sift out the list as he might, no name more likely than another presented itself to his intelligence.

The fierce and reckless courage which was so prominent a trait in his character had rarely showed in stronger relief than it did on this

occasion, against the dangers and possibilities which formed the background of this lonely journey. He changed his mount twice upon the road, and so it came that evening was beginning to close in when the slender padre, riding upon a mule, found himself in a land of wild heath that sloped gently upwards, with here and there shallow upland pools, from amongst the reeds of which rose the constant plash and cry of wildfowl.

During the afternoon he had seen far off a few solitary huts of shepherds, and later, now and then, the ruddy glow of a charcoal-burner's fire. But all the time his mind ran in the same jarring groove of surmises, and he was shaken by little gusts of passion that individuals could be found of so hardy a type that they should dare to drag him into the network of their schemes.

The game, which for the sake of the captured women he must play lone-handed, was one of enormous risk, if only because of the fact that he carried a bare two-thirds of the ransom demanded. Moreover, he could make no guess at the number or the identity of his opponents.

But now the end of his ride was near, and the pale, clean-shaven face of the padre bore an expression almost approaching docility. As the dark woods by the side of the road closed

in about him, and his mule ambled from one black patch of shadow into another, his thin tenor was raised in the notes of Latin canticles.

Such was the personage that met the astonished gaze of a masked man on a black horse, who stood waiting in the shadow of an ilex-grove. As the priest approached he spurred his horse out across the road.

The padre drew up his mule, and raised his eyes meekly, but without timidity.

"I think, my son, that you are expecting me. No?"

The man on the horse stared the harder. "I am expecting someone," he said, "but not—"

The padre shook his head sadly. "Ah, you men of blood!" he sighed. "Nevertheless, I am the messenger of señor Don Ricardo Ingham."

"And you have the money?"

"It is true that I carry some money—for your master."

"He can't call himself that!" said the young man roughly, "though he could trust none of them but me," he grumbled to himself. "Turn your mule, padre; the captain orders you to pay the ransom into his own hand, and the women will be given up to you."

"I am ready, my son, lead the way," replied the priest.

The horseman looked again at the slight

figure upon the mule, then, as if reassured by his inspection, without more words he rode slowly down the road. The padre upon his mule ambled behind, and as he rode he chanted in a low voice the music of his Church.

At the end of an hour they had passed through a chain of low hills, and emerged upon a district which the brigand had rarely visited, and through which he had never before ridden in the dark. The night had now fallen duskily, with a hollow moon and many stars in a clear sky. Once or twice the guide paused as if uncertain of his direction, and then, with a glance at the Great Bear, by which he was evidently steering his way, he pressed forward again. Heath and forest, swamp and mountain-spur slipped past half seen in the gloom of the deepening hours. Not for a moment had the padre relaxed his attitude of vigilant alertness, noting to the best of his power the landmarks of the way.

At length they dropped between two converging lines of trees like a tunnel, at the end of which a dark bluish circle of sky showed faintly; against this the triangle of the guide's head and shoulders jogged monotonously for a long time, until at length he swung abruptly to the right, and the padre found himself in the gloom of a thick wood. They moved through this slowly, but before long came upon a low,

widespread house, that Don Q. guessed to be the remains of some ancient Moorish dwelling-place.

The guide dismounted, and bade the padre tie up his mule; then, giving a curious knock upon the door, he pushed the priest whom he was escorting across the end of a vast dark room, and so through a door, with a gruff word that he could keep the women company until the captain's orders were known.

The priest stood still for a moment. A rush-light upon the floor gave a faint illumination to the small chamber with its rough stone walls, in the far corner of which he saw a woman sitting with her back to him. At her feet a young girl knelt, whose bright, long hair seemed the only spot of radiance in the gloomy place.

The padre crossed the room, but the woman remained with her head averted. He gently laid his hand upon her shoulder.

She looked up with a suppressed cry.

"Have no fear, my daughter, I have come to your aid," he said softly. "I am the messenger of the Consul."

Mrs Lintner touched his arm as if to assure herself that this was not a dream, then she broke down into sobbing.

"You have been ill-used, I fear?"

"Oh, father, we have endured much, we

have endured much! This Don Q. is a cruel, oh, a horrible man!"

The padre started violently.

"You are only just in time!" she whispered, glancing at the door. "If you had arrived half-an-hour later, I don't know what would have become of Flora and of me. He threatened us in a dreadful manner!"

The priest brooded for a moment wrathfully. "Well, well, I shall see the colour of his blood before the morning!" he said reassuringly; then, seeing the scared look coming back to Mrs Lintner's face, he added: "Our time is short, my daughter, and I must know some particulars about this person in order that I may be able to deal with him the more effectually. What is he like? I have heard that Don Q. is a man of a certain presence, and carries himself with something of the noble manner."

"Oh, no, no! People say that in the plains, but it is not true. I don't know what he may once have been, but now he is a violent, brutal boor, without, I believe, a human feeling left."

The priest's hands worked in uncontrollable excitement. "Don Q. a violent boor!" he exclaimed. "But this is indeed abominable! What is the aspect of this creature?"

"He is tall and very strong, with a red beard

and threatening eyes. But you will see him. I pray he may not kill you," said poor Mrs Lintner.

"Courage, courage, dear lady," the padre said kindly, and the young girl, looking up suddenly at the slight, cassock-clad figure seemed to find confidence in his face, for she seized his hand and covered it with kisses. "He will save us, mother, I know that he will save us. Oh, padre, take us away from this place or I shall die!"

"Be very brave, my child. I will do what I can. Hark! they are calling me." He moved away from them and passed quickly round the walls. Finding a hole in the ancient stonework, he plunged his hand deeply into it, and then stood ready to accompany his guide, who threw open the door and called to him in a surly voice.

"The captain wants you."

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW DON Q. BECAME A SQUIRE OF DAMES— (*continued*)

Don Q., resuming his air of gentle amiability, walked back into the great room through which he had come. It was now lit at the further end

by a brazero of glowing charcoal, about which four men were sitting, their faces painted against the dark in red light and black shadow. Don Q. saw now what manner of foes he had to face. These were not lawless or outlawed peasants, such as was the man they had sent to meet him ; in fact, he judged them to be not Spaniards at all, but those cosmopolitan scoundrels, often broken men whose intelligence makes them the more dangerous, who drift from city to city, living by their wits and primed to the most desperate enterprises.

Don Q.'s eyes hardly swept over the others, but they fixed themselves upon the man whose cloak and sombrero left little of him visible except his heavy frame, and short red beard.

" Here, you, Dwyer," ordered this personage in bad Spanish, " throw a bit of bark on the brazier, and let us see this fellow."

One of the men obeyed, and while the bark flared up, it showed not only the unshaven faces of the men dirty and bloodshot, but a great circle of empty space behind them ; yet, so huge was the room, that darkness still found an abiding-place in all its corners. It did not take Don Q. a second to realise that he was in one of those old Moorish dwellings from which Tarik may have ridden forth to battle, and over which a thousand years has small power.

While thinking this, he took off his hat and bowed to the group before him.

The redbeard stood up and, with a burlesque flourish, took off his hat in reply. The face thus shown was remarkable; it shone with that exaggerated pallor which sometimes accompanies dark red hair; the man's beard did not cover his big thrust-out underlip, which added a savage emphasis to his jeering eyes.

"I am el capitan," he said; "let us hear your name."

"I, señor capitan, am but a poor servant of the Church, and sent by the Consul Ingham to represent him."

"That is enough. You have brought the ransom. Hand it over that I may count it, for if it be a peseta short—"

The priest spread out his hands. "But the ladies have not yet been set at liberty," he remonstrated urbanely.

"Certainly not. The preliminaries must first be gone through. When I have the money, they shall be set free. Hand it over. Do you hear?"

"But perfectly, señor. Yet I fear I cannot hand over the ransom unless my instructions be first complied with."

"Let us hear your instructions."

"That the ladies be permitted to set out for

Malaga under proper escort, and that, having given them two hours' start, I then place the ransom in the hands of Don Q., and receive an acquittance from him."

The captain held his hat on his hip with one hand while he snapped the fingers of the other. "That for your instructions!" he said.

"Señor capitan, I am solemnly pledged to carry through this arrangement," expostulated the padre.

"We cannot linger here all night," roared the captain. "Hand over the money without delay."

"I fear it is impossible," returned the priest with a gentle obstinacy that accorded with his cloth.

"Perhaps you will not think it impossible when you realise your position more exactly. It seems to me that we can take the ransom from your dead body with precisely the same ease as from your living hand. You crow too loudly, my little cock of Spain!"

An extraordinary change swept over the face of the priest.

"Corpse of a scullion!" he cried. "You are one of those men whom it is good theology to kill!"

So appalling was the rancour and energy of the attenuated figure, that the other men leaped

up to intervene. But the priest recovered himself quickly.

"There, there, señor capitan, forgive my hastiness. My hot temper makes my life a prolonged penance. I trust I did not alarm you." He included the whole party in his apology.

"Curse your obstinacy! You won't give up the money? Is that your last word?"

"It is my last word, save that even should you succeed in killing me, you would not obtain the ransom."

"Then you have not brought it?" exclaimed the captain, handling the knife in his belt.

"You mistake. I merely took the precaution of hiding it. How else could a poor churchman enforce these demands upon you?"

"What if we kill you and the women too?"

"As to that, we men of the cassock live to die. The ladies, alas!—but I will not for a moment believe that you gentlemen of much business ability will lose so large a stake for the want of a little acquiescence with the British consul's demands."

The big man reflected. "Dwyer," he said suddenly, "question Carmelito as to the place where this fellow hid the money. He must have noticed something."

But Carmelito, coming in from doing sentry

outside, pleaded that the night was dark, and that the padre had ridden all the way behind him.

"Lose no more time, señor capitan, I implore you," said the priest. "Without my aid you will in truth never find the ransom. Bring forth the ladies and send them as far as the high road to Malaga in charge of this excellent Carmelito, and two hours after their departure, by my watch, it will give me great pleasure to produce the ransom and to settle up all outstanding details in a manner that will, I trust, be satisfactory to at least one of us."

"What guarantee have we that you will carry out your part of the bargain?"

"The honour of a gentleman of Spain. And reflect that in case I do not satisfy you, shall I not still be in your power?"

The captain and his companions consulted for some minutes in low tones. It amused Don Q. to see the glances cast at him. After some discussion, the big man gave his orders, Carmelito brought horses to the door, Mrs Lintner and her daughter were mounted without being allowed to speak to the padre, though the girl looked back at him and kissed her hand, and soon Don Q. heard the hoof-beats of the little cavalcade dying away in the distance.

The four remaining men stood about the

door, and for an instant a temptation assailed the brigand. He would have been more than human had it not done so. His enemies were four to one, but here was a chance for freedom, yet he must redeem his word. On his personal danger he wasted no thought, for with every year the belief in him strengthened that he would not die until certain matters which he had at heart were brought to their appointed conclusion.

None of the men went out to keep watch in place of Carmelito; the whole four clustered back together to sit sullenly by the brazero. The position was too strained for silence, and soon such talk began to circulate that the priest begged leave to sit apart on the plea that he wished to pursue certain pious meditations. After some wrangling this was permitted, and whenever the scowling syndicate by the brazero looked round they could see the mild padre with his breviary in his hand and his lips moving. Only once as the time dragged on was he directly addressed. Then the captain cried out to know what he was doing, and the answer came back from the padre that he was engaged in praying for the repose of their souls.

Slowly the minutes filtered by. A storm was beginning to rise, and the trees creaked and sobbed under the gale. The charcoal

falling low in the brazier was constantly renewed, and still the unseemly talk and brutal laughter occupied the group about it.

So it happened that Don Q. was the first to hear a shout in the wood and the sound of horses galloping furiously. A second later they all sprang to their feet, for a man struck upon the door with a wild cry.

"The Guardias Civiles! The Civiles are upon us!"

The men made a dash for the open, and the captain, with a curse, fired as he ran at the corner where the padre had withdrawn for his devotions.

But with the earliest alarm Don Q. had darted into the inner room. In a second he reappeared and stood listening to the fight outside. He heard the trampling of horses and the quick fusillade of a running encounter, then a groan or two, and the voice of the officer in command giving sharp orders. There was a lull and then again the noise of the battle boiled up into the night.

Don Q., with a revolver in his hand, stood beside the open door. The wind roared in the trees overhead, when suddenly the big red-bearded man rushed back into the house.

"Curse you! You betrayed us," he cried.

But Don Q. knocked up his hand. "You

fool! I did not betray you!" he said, "and I will hide you now. Quick, into the place where the women were! The *civiles* are coming. Quick, it is your only chance."

The big man listened to the running footsteps and voices growing louder.

"I must trust you," he snarled, and vanished into the inner room. Don Q. pushed to the outer door, and when the first man in pursuit thrust it open he found the fragile-looking padre sitting by the brazero with his hands clasped tightly over his ears. He strode up and touched him on the arm.

"Did you see him? One of the villains broke back."

"Broke back into this room?" repeated the padre in astonishment. "Had he come here, I must assuredly have seen him. You are the lieutenant?"

"Yes, of the Carbineers. I am glad we were in time, father. The señora Lintner told us of your danger."

The priest raised his hands. "Ah, the ladies, are they safe?"

"Yes, we met them by chance as I was marching with some of my own men and a couple of *civiles*. The fellow who was with her bolted at once to give the alarm here I suppose. We galloped after him. You are a brave man.

padre, although you stopped your ears," said the young lieutenant with a smile.

" The sounds of violence are terrifying, my son. Have you seized these unhappy men ? "

" One is killed, and we have taken two, both wounded. But the red-haired fellow ran back."

The padre got stiffly upon his feet. " He is skulking among the trees, perhaps," and he accompanied the lieutenant to the door.

" I will come back for you, padre."

" No, no, my son, do not let me detain you. I will sit here and regain my composure, and later I will take my mule and ride back into Castellano." As he spoke his eyes took on a concentrated stare as he pointed out into the windy dark. " There, there, do you not see him ? There ! he is running, the big red-beard."

The lieutenant waited for no more ; he raced out among the trees, call answered call in the gloom, the Carbineers were systematically searching the wood, but after a time as they drew blank, they carried away their prisoners, and the padre sat down alone by the glow of the brazier. Outside the wind still rocked in the trees and showers of rain beat upon the old Moorish walls. But through the confusion of outer sounds the padre heard a slight stir within. He lifted his head.

" Why do you not come out, señor capitan ? "

he said. "The *civiles* are gone, and I am quite alone."

The big man slunk cautiously into the circle of glowing light. "Why did you not give me up to the Carbineers?" he asked.

The padre rose to his feet. "Because the settlement between us had yet to be accomplished."

"Some cursed notion of your honour, I suppose?" jeered the other.

"Exactly, some cursed notion of my honour. Now let us finish our business. First, I must tell you that one of your companions is dead, the others have been wounded and taken away as prisoners."

The big man laughed indifferently. "Which is none the worse luck for me," he said. "In a syndicate the survivor is heir."

The priest drew a paper from his pocket. "This is, I understand, the demand for the ransom sent in by Don Q. And who are you, señor capitan?"

"I represent Don Q. Come, if you keep me waiting—" he plucked a knife from his belt.

"Will you look at this?" said the padre, offering the paper he held to his companion.

The big man leant towards the brazero to read it. It was the original demand, and written

across the bottom in a neat angular hand were the words :

" Received £6000,
" (signed) Q."

" What fooling is this ? " he asked, with a violent movement. " Is this your good faith ? "

The padre sprang back beyond the reach of the blow, and then el capitan saw that he held a revolver.

" You dared to make use of my name for your vile purposes," he said, his voice was low as before, but the tone was changed, " and now you would further dare to question my right of signature ? "

The great red-bearded man drew in his breath through his teeth. " Well," he answered, with a fierce laugh, " you are a master-hand, Don Q.— yet I deserve something."

" True, you deserve something."

The big man broke into fulsome speech, but all the while he was watching his opponent narrowly. Suddenly he kicked over the brazero : at the same instant a shot rang out.

Five minutes later the padre upon his mule met with a pair of *civiles* in the wood, and exchanged a word or two with them before he rode on, a dark figure against the lemon-coloured dawn which had burned up behind the ilex trees.

Upon the following day Ingham found upon

his office table a packet which he recognised. It bore an inscription :

" With the compliments of the padre to whom Don Ricardo did the honour of intrusting a delicate and an illustrious mission."

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW DON Q. ATTENDED A BULL-FIGHT

THE return of the milder seasons was always welcome to Don Q., partly because his frail health strengthened in the warmth, but rather perhaps because his solitude was more apt to be broken by events, by comings and goings to and from the world he had so long forsaken.

With the spring he journeyed to the lower levels, camping in lonely spots but yet within touch of the varied life of the plains. It was on one of these excursions that he received a visitor, long known to him but whose fear was very evident as she trod lightly over the carpet of pine-needles.

The young girl stood full in the patch of sunshine, trembling. Suddenly she stretched out an eloquent, sunburnt hand.

" I have come," she said, " to seek help from my lord of the mountains."

Don Q., withdrawn under the shadow of the pine-trees beside a smouldering fire, glanced at her.

" Why should I help you ? " he asked.

Her tear-filled eyes brimmed over, and her lovely face grew whiter.

" My lord, I am Valentina ! " she exclaimed.

" I know it. You are she to whom the gracious duquesa d'Orava gave the prize as being the most beautiful girl in the province."

" Yes, lord," sobbed the girl, as if admitting a crime.

" You are, moreover, that blue-eyed, black-haired Valentina, for whose sake many fingers have touched the guitar ? "

" Yes, lord," she confessed as piteously as before. Then she broke out with passion. " But I loved only Sebastian ! "

Don Q. lit a cigarette. " And this Sebastian ? "

" He is gone, lord ! Three days ago he disappeared, and we were to have been married on Sunday, the day of the *corrida* at Zurcanez. If my lord will condescend to hear me. . . . My life is broken ! "

" I do not forget those persons who have performed services for me, and you are one of them, Valentina," said Don Q. " Speak, then ; afterwards you can weep, if it be still necessary."

The girl clasped her hands on her heaving bosom, and plunged into the story of her wrongs.

"Sebastian was a herder of bulls on the estate of his excellency the Count of Zurcanez. But he had a great ambition."

"In what direction did this ambition lie?"

"Lord, he desired to become a matador, an *espada;* he was so strong and so brave!"

Don Q. waved his hand impatiently. "Continue."

"Sebastian and his father, and also, as far back as the oldest can remember, his people have lived on the hither side of the plain of Zurcanez, near to the Marisma de los Antiguos. Always they have served the Counts of Zurcanez, guarding and driving the great herds of bulls. For, as my lord knows, the fame of the black fighting bulls of Zurcanez has spread over the entire world. Never is there a *corrida* of mark in the *plaza de toros*, whether it be in Granada, or Seville, or Madrid, but a black bull of Zurcanez tosses his spears in the sunlight of the arena."

"You wander from your story," interrupted Don Q., gently; "but I will pardon you, although as concerning the bulls of Zurcanez I have forgotten more than you can ever learn. They are truly of a noble breed. But I wait."

"As I have told my lord, Sebastian and his

forefathers have been ever in the service of the black bulls. It is they who have watched them on the marshes ; it is they who have driven them, led by the bells of the trained oxen, to the bull-rings. More than a hundred men are *ganaderos* upon the estate, and all of them love their work. Alas ! only four days ago life was happy for Sebastian ! "

" You lose time."

" Forgive me, lord, but you must know all," said the girl, pleadingly. " During the winter that is past his excellency died. Has my lord not heard how, when he lay sick at the *estancia* of Zurcanez, he commanded them to throw open the window, and those that were with him supported him to the embrasure, in order that he might once more see the sun shine on the bright black sides of the tried bulls, which at that moment, by chance or by order, passed slowly across the vega before his eyes. Thereafter, in a little while his excellency died, and we upon the estate, for my father is also of Zurcanez, lost a good master and gained a bad one."

Don Q. frowned. " But I have heard good things of the young Count Ferdinand."

" All that you heard is true, lord, but he loves to voyage far across the sea. And in his place the señor Don Jaimé del Monte rules at Zurcanez. Lately, at the due season for the

trials of the young bulls, Don Jaimé came from M[illegible]d. I saw him when the herds were gathered."

"Ah! and Don Jaimé saw you, Valentina. I have heard that every pretty woman interests him."

"It was thus Sebastian spoke of him, lord," faltered Valentina, "for he has the jealous eyes of a lover. But I dwell far from the casa on the edge of the Marisma, in a place which it is not good to approach unless one knows the path. But it happened on a day that Don Jaimé came shooting teal and duck upon the marshes, and the birds flying to the laguna led him astray, and I heard his cries for help. None other was with me in the house, and I made him a *tortilla*, and gave him of our country wine, and he lingered a very long time. . . . Thus, when Sebastian heard of it, his heart was hot against Don Jaimé."

"After that Don Jaimé came often and spoke to you of the joys of Madrid?" said Don Q. with a sardonic smile.

The girl looked at him startled. "My lord has already heard of these things?"

"Yes, Valentina, for it is an ancient tale which has been told throughout the centuries to foolish women."

"But I did not wish to listen to him, lord! . . .

And also Sebastian was ordered to attend to the business of the estate in distant places.'"

"And he has always obeyed?"

"Not always, lord. And once when Don Jaimé spoke to me of Madrid, he heard. I answered that I should never see the gay and splendid things of which the señor spoke. But Don Jaimé laughed with words that seemed kind . . . but Sebastian loosened his knife in its sheath, where he lay hidden, for he liked not the colour of that laugh. . . . Nevertheless, Don Jaimé has shown favour to Sebastian, and praised him much, and promised to aid him. My lord knows that yearly there is a *corrida* (bull-fight) held at the season of the carnival. It is a custom upon the estate. His excellency always gave the spectacle to his people. Sebastian was to be one of the *espadas*. For months he has talked much of it, for he is a man of a great heart; and if he did well he would go down to Seville and become famous!"

"And you wish this also?" inquired Don Q. "Do you not know that the great *espadas* are much adored by women, and have many to love them, even some who bear names hundreds of years old?"

"I have heard it, lord," answered Valentina with a quick sigh. "But it was Sebastian's desire, and I love him. We spoke together of

it on Monday, and none have seen him since he left me at my father's house."

"Perhaps he has gone upon a journey?"

She shook her head. "He would have told me, to whom he tells everything"

"Perhaps he is fickle?" suggested Don Q. again.

Valentina laughed suddenly and clearly, her lovely face lighting up. "Oh, no, lord," she said simply.

Don Q. sat silent for a moment.

"And why have you not applied to Don Jaimé for help?" he said at last.

"My father went to the *estancia*, and there has been much talk, and Don Jaimé spoke shameful things—that Sebastian had run away because of fear. . . . None can find Sebastian, lord, and if he does not appear at the *corrida* many ears will hear Don Jaimé's words, and many tongues will ruin his reputation for ever! How, then, can he hope to win a great name in the bull-rings?"

"I will consider the matter, Valentina. You have done well to come to me. Return now to your home and shed no more tears. Go, my child; no protestations, they weary me."

Don Q. watched the girl descending the hillside. She moved with the inimitable grace of an Andalucian, and with her went a couple

of Don Q.'s men to act as guides until she left the region of the sierra. For some time after they disappeared he remained deep in thought.

Now, it is a fact that had Valentina been a stranger to him, he would in all probability have taken no further interest in her affair, and this for a reason clear enough to his own mind. Sebastian had no claim upon him, and though it pleased the brigand very frequently to be the protector of the poor about the foothills, it was not his rule to espouse individual causes except on behalf of members of his own following, or of his intelligence department. To these he was ever a staunch friend, and there was not one of them but knew that in Don Q. he or she possessed a mysterious and powerful champion.

Yet, although they were aware of this fact, appeals for his help were seldom made, for the man who came into the mountains to ask for justice or the punishment of his enemy without good cause was apt to fall in for punishment himself, and, moreover, to receive it in a form which brought home to him the full enormity of his offence. And it is certain that these qualities of unswerving justice and of equally unswerving callousness had a far-reaching influence upon the success of Don Q.'s career.

Of the service which Valentina had once

rendered to the brigand there is no need to speak at length, for the story has been told elsewhere. It was a sufficiently slight one, but that mattered nothing, for, in the judgment of Don Q., a service done ranked as an obligation, and he would have gone to any personal risk to repay it.

Towards the middle of the afternoon he called to him one of his band, named Gaspár, a sinewy fellow, with a fierce, lowering face.

"You have a knowledge of the estate of his excellency the Count of Zurcanez?" asked Don Q.

"I have tended the bulls upon it for many months, lord."

"That is well. The estate at the moment is managed by a gentleman from Madrid, Don Jaimé del Monte. It is now three o'clock, by eight to-morrow evening I shall be within touch of the ilex wood that lies two leagues from the village of Zuzcanez. You must also be there to meet me, bringing with you Don Jaimé, with whom I desire to hold a conversation."

"I am at the command of my lord."

"It is possible you will find Don Jaimé riding alone to the house of José Garcia, who lives near to the Marisma de los Antiguos, . . . That is your affair. If Don Jaimé be not at the ilex wood to meet me I shall hold you responsible.

Also Estaban and Grulla, who will accompany you. *Con Dios*, my child."

With this softly-spoken benediction Don Q. dismissed Gaspár, and then settled down by the camp fire for the evening.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW DON Q. ATTENDED A BULL-FIGHT— (*continued*)

It must be admitted that the brigand was devoured of *ennui* in his mountain fastnesses, and as he sat solitary his mind went back to the days when old Spain sent forth knights, and after them adventurers on splendid errands of chivalry and conquest. He touched his guitar with absent fingers, and sang in his high, sweet tenor of heroes long dead, who had fought against the Moors and finally rolled back that black wave of invasion from Europe. The truth, indeed, was apparent that the brigand had not been born in the century proper for the calling out of his great gifts. He had a deep feeling for the romance of history. Had he lived, some centuries earlier he might, nay, would,

have earned true glory and a place among the high names of history and of song, instead of that which fell to his lot in other annals of a more modern and more disjointed world.

The moon had risen when Don Q. mounted his mule and began his journey towards the ilex groves of Zurcanez. Valentina, making straight for the plains, had probably almost reached her home, but for the brigand it was imperative to follow a longer route, which wound among the bridle-paths and lonely defiles of the mountains. The little cavalcade rode all night, at first pursued by wind-voices through the heights, then between the murmuring forests of the foothills, until at length they emerged upon the gentle slopes and marshes where the bull-frogs held their nightly choruses. Thus by daylight they were deep among the blossoming plains.

But enough of the journey, which, like most of those undertaken by Don Q., did not lack incident of a certain kind. Twice he and his men avoided the *guardias civiles*, who, in their dark cloaks and three-cornered hats, rode on unsuspectingly; in an even more remote spot they hid themselves until a band of smugglers passed upon their way, who, as they urged their pack-mules along the narrow path, invoked the name of Don Q. as that of a patron

saint, though they might have used it less freely had they guessed to whose ears their idle talk was drifted.

At about the same hour that Don Q. and his men settled into their concealed camp in the woods, Don Jaimé rode out through the early sunshine from the *estancia*. All the winds of spring were blowing in the lush meadows, and he smiled in unconscious response to their influence.

In this part of the estate woods ran up into the low hills of the boundaries, and here it was that Grulla acted poacher, and drew Don Jaimé on and on into the fringe of trees, where among the green shadows Gaspár and Estaban did their part. It suffices to say that six compelling hands, with the aid of a raw-hide rope, performed without hitch a business to which they were well accustomed, and by noon the three bandits with their reluctant charge arrived on the outskirts of that ilex wood indicated by Don Q.

Presently a little hut showed among the trees, and Don Jaimé, finding himself near a dwelling, raised an outcry for help.

"Psst!" snarled Gaspár, "would you wake the King of the Sierra from his siesta"?

"What exclaimed Don Jaimé, "it cannot be that Don Q.— Such a thing has never yet

been heard of at Zurcanez! Speak, at whose orders have you brought me here?"

But Gaspár's swarthy face had resumed its wooden stare, and he only pushed his captive down the game-track into the recesses of the wood.

The position of affairs between Don Q. and the owner of the black bulls of Zurcanez needs, perhaps, some elucidation. For many years the brigand had held actual sway over the mountainous districts at no great distance from the estate, and during all those years a mutual tolerance had existed.

Now, this sentiment of reciprocity, of "live and let live," was not really so strange as might appear at first sight. The old Count had been known to nod and smile over those mysterious exploits, which, even in the *estancia*, were told in hushed tones. For Don Q. had never raided the Zurcanez farms, although it would have been easy for him to do so; and, in return, the old Count had held himself neutral when expeditions to harass the brigand had been sent up into the sierra. Many of Don Q.'s best men were drawn from the ranks of the *ganaderos* (herdsmen) of Zurcanez, but they came back and forth to the village still, and crossed the estate when it suited their plans without question from the Count's people.

Thus the angry surprise of Don Jaimé can be imagined when he found himself face to face with the figure that had become traditional in the plains. But the Count's manager was no fool, and resolved to treat the position as one of friendship. He bowed low, and remained uncovered.

"Pray replace your hat, señor," said Don Q. with suavity.

Don Jaimé felt more at his ease, for a welcome guest is often bidden to retain his hat. "I am honoured in being permitted to enter your presence, caballero," he answered politely.

Don Q. replied to the compliment in form, then looking out over the green plains, which could be seen through a break in the forest, he added, "I think, señor, that this Spain of ours is the saddest country in the wide world. Look upon that landscape, hallowed by a thousand historical associations. Fernando wandered there, Azara may have looked upon it."

"I perceive, señor, that you are something of a poet," remarked Don Jaimé with a flattering warmth.

But for some reason his pallid, smiling face displeased Don Q. "I am grateful for your appreciation," he said in a cold voice, "but the charms of this conversation must not permit me to lose sight of the purpose for which you

are here. I thank you for so quickly responding to my summons."

"It came in a form, señor, impossible to refuse."

"My apologies." Don Q. bowed with ceremony, then added: "I have sought this interview, Don Jaimé, because you threaten me with disappointment."

"May I venture to hope that it is one which it lies in my power to avert?" said the other, still smiling.

Don Q. shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows? But allow me to explain. I need hardly tell you that I am something of a recluse, and the *plaza de toros* of Madrid or of Seville is out of my reach. Therefore the yearly *corrida* on the estate of Zurcanez excites in me an undue interest. You understand?"

"But perfectly, señor."

"I was told that this year you had given permission to a certain Sebastian of Zurcanez to appear as an *espada*. Rumour declared the young man to be a promising and courageous young fellow?" Don Q. paused as if for an answer.

"He has certainly *created* something of a reputation," returned Don Jaimé, with a derisive emphasis on the verb.

"Ah! Further, in virtue of your suggestion

and the Count's noble generosity, he is to be matched with the gallant and dangerous young bull, Flamenco. It should prove a remarkable experiment."

"Do you by any chance honour us by being a spectator?" inquired Don Jaimé.

"Alas, no! But news of the result is very quickly transmitted to my poor house in the sierra. . . . Figure to yourself, therefore, my dismay when I heard that the excellent Sebastian had vanished."

Don Q. waved his cigarette in a manner suggestive of complete loss, as though Sebastian might have fallen over the edge of the world into space.

An odd sideways gleam shot through the eyes of Don Jaimé. The brigand marked it and waited to see what it might mean.

"Vanished?" repeated Don Jaimé after a scarcely perceptible pause, then he burst into a fit of laughter. "You have been absurdly misled, caballero! . . . And yet I have heard that your intelligence department is the best-organised combination of its kind in Europe!"

A frown furrowed the brigand's forehead under his sombrero. "May I inquire the cause of your mirth?" he asked.

"I saw Sebastian not two hours before leaving the *estancia;* he is fulfilling his ordinary duties.

I fear, señor, you must buy spectacles for your spies!" Don Jaimé's temper was a good deal ruffled, and he could not suppress the taunt. "I can assure you that Sebastian is going about his work as usual at Zurcanez, and will undoubtedly appear at the *corrida* unless his courage evaporates in the meantime."

"If that be so, señor, I must ask your forgiveness for taking up an hour or two of your morning. . . . Nevertheless, believe me, I shall hold you responsible for Sebastian's appearance on Sunday," concluded Don Q. with an impressive geniality that somehow brought no sense of comfort to Don Jaimé.

"In the devil's name you cannot be serious!" he exclaimed. "Why should I be responsible? It is none of my business."

Don Q. held up his hand. "On the contrary, let me advise you to make it very much your business," he answered softly. "And now we will drink a cup of wine to the future glory of the black bulls of Zurcanez."

And here became manifest that touch of community which makes all Spain akin. These two men were enemies and they knew it. Yet heartily they drank together in that delicate vintage wherein Don Q. always pledged his guests; they drank to the fortune of the bull-ring, to the blazing sunshine and the hot sand,

to the gallant and well-armed bull, and to the *espada* who dealt the death-blow in the most intrepid fashion.

Afterwards Don Jaimé made his most ceremonious farewells.

Don Q. understood that the little encounter which had just taken place represented no more than the preliminary crossing of swords between two strong antagonists. Don Jaimé had yielded with a ready falsehood to the pressure of the circumstances brought to bear upon him; moreover, he would certainly set Sebastian at liberty; but Don Q. had read the sly gleam in the eyes of his opponent, who, while seeming to give way to one attack, was secretly maturing another, and, probably, more formidable one. Reports from Zurcanez proved that Valentina's beauty had completely captured the fancy of Don Jaimé, and Don Q. judged him to be a man who would not hesitate to compel events to his own ends.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW DON Q. ATTENDED A BULL-FIGHT— (*continued*)

THE matador rises from the tawny earth of Spain. He plays a great part in his own world, for it is necessary to realise the fact that the imaginative Andalucian is accompanied through all his daily tasks by one strong delight of anticipation—to see bull and man stand against each other in the breathless, torrid sunshine of the following Sunday afternoon. Hence the love of the bull-ring can never be quenched, and old men ache through twenty years of exile for the scent of the arena, the trampled dust, the outrageous sunshine, and the wild, fierce game in which the stakes are life.

Thus it can be understood that his ambition lay deep at Sebastian's heart. For although this was not a *fiesta de toros* in some historic city, but merely one of those irregular *corridas*—in which nameless men kill nameless bulls, or are killed by them—he had to-day the great chance of his lifetime, for he was to be pitted against Flamenco. And was not this the reason why so great a throng had gathered even in that lonely place ?

The first part of the entertainment was over, and the people, gesticulating and excited, stood or sat about the rough inclosure of the bull-ring and bought water and sweetmeats and nuts from the shouting vendors who moved about amongst them. It was a bronzed, happy crowd, clad in gay colours, and in spite of its many rags, magnificently appreciative of its chance of pleasure.

So thought a man in a soutana and broad black hat who stood in the dark vestry of the little church and gazed pensively out through the slit of barred window which gave a view of the arena. For it is a law of the bull-ring that a doctor and a priest shall be in attendance. At Zurcanez a barber represented the first, and luckily, as the good priest of the village had been called away, another of his cloth, journeying to Cadiz, had opportunely offered his services. It was he who stood with his hands behind him, looking out, now at the various faces in the tumultuous throng, now at the raised chair of the president, where Don Jaimé sat, pallid and listless, acting his part as if it bored him.

In him centred the whole management of the occasion; it was by his order the trumpet blew which marked the different phases of the fights.

Already one bull had been killed, a somewhat tame performance, for the animal had been young and unwilling to face his tormentors. But now the people were again beginning to gather about the barriers, shouting and calling for the great event of the day.

The door of the vestry opened softly, and Valentina stood white as ashes amongst the cool shadows, where in past years many a young aspirant to bull-ring fame had sobbed out his life.

"Lord, I fear!" she said.

Don Q. turned back to look at the beautiful, troubled face.

"Sebastian is a man of courage?" he asked coldly.

"Sebastian is as brave as a lion, lord! But Flamenco—lord, Sebastian is here—"

"He would speak with me? Enter, Sebastian. Go you, pray to the saints, my child," he added to Valentina as the young bull-fighter entered.

Sebastian bowed low before Don Q. "Will my lord forgive me, but it may be that to-day I shall receive the horns of Flamenco," he paused.

Don Q. met the steady dark eyes, and the words he was about to speak were not spoken.

"No, lord," resumed the young man, smiling sadly, "I have no fear; but it may be if I die that Don Jaimé will carry away Valentina."

"Be well assured, Sebastian, that shall never be."

Sebastian laughed a little. "I thank my lord. Now I go to give or take the death-blow."

Outside a shout arose. "Flamenco!" the people cried, "Flamenco!" and then "Viva Don Jaimé! Viva! Viva!"

The crowd were praising Don Jaimé, because he had given them a great bull, a named bull, Flamenco! The bull that had killed Solito, a bull almost without a peer in the herd, worth, so men said, four hundred dollars in Seville or in Granada.

"Toro!" they screamed. "Bravo, toro!" as Flamenco swung out into the centre of the ring.

The spectators were good judges of bulls, and in Flamenco they could find no fault. He was standing sullenly with his head held low, but moving his feet a little, and as the muscles rippled under the skin, he showed a lighter shade than the jet-black hides of the Zurcanez breed usually exhibited. The men appraised him point by point, the small strong hoofs, the straight, sharp "spears," a head and muzzle fine and well bred, a mighty neck,—oh, a great bull, without blemish, perfect!

Inside that humble ring such a bull had never stood before! Even the children cried his name; but Valentina looked at Flamenco

and her heart died in her bosom, for he had a reputation, this Flamenco, he was a *carnicero*, a slaughtering bull—it was said that he disregarded lures and attacked the man behind them.

What followed is best taken from the autobiography of Don Q.

"At Zurcanez, they have, alas! no picadores; but the men on foot in the arena began the attack in a manner that I applauded from the vestry, for it was bold and prettily done, although they were persons of small experience. A single banderilla had been successfully planted in the neck of Flamenco, and, in truth, the first assaults upon the bull were just developing themselves, when the signal was given for the *espada*, the final trumpet was blown!

"There were cries of protest raised by the crowd, who desired to see Flamenco played for the usual period, until, as is our custom, the animal tires somewhat. . . . I heard Valentina shriek, for she also realised at that moment that the life of an *espada* lies in the hands of the president. Never in all my years of connection with the bull-ring, never have I seen the like! That an *espada* should be called upon to face a strong and cunning bull so long before the appointed moment was a matter of shame. But Don Jaimé sat immobile.

"I chanced to look round for Sebastian, and what I saw pleased me. Without hesitation he strode towards the bull, upon his face came no shadow of fear. He knew how great was his peril, and also how great was the honour to be gained by death in such a manner. Forgetting certain things which at another moment I might have remembered, I hastened out to take my place at the barrier."

So far Don Q.

Sebastian moved out towards the bull. He was a tallish fellow, slight, with a wiry strength that was apparent in every graceful, balanced movement. His handsome face showed a pale glow as of triumph. Those who came from far questioned who was the Sebastian that he should be honoured in facing this superb bull? A bull worthy of the foremost *diestros*, of Espartero, of Lamartijo!

"*Demonio!*" said another, "he will pay for his honour, for this Flamenco should have given us much sport before the trumpet sounded. See, he is unspent and in the full tide of his strength. He is, moreover, a murderous one, and of a cunning brain. I who speak, know, for am I not the *ganadero* who has tended him these two years past?"

Flamenco stood waiting in the middle of the arena, with characteristically lowered head, and

from his long horns fluttered rags torn from the cloaks of the *chulos*. A hush stole down through the sunshine over the heated, frenzied crowd, as the young *espada* looked up at Don Jaimé in the president's seat, and, lifting his hand, spoke the approved formula, then flung his hat upon the ground, and advanced, covering his straight matador's sword with the red flag rolled on a stick that is called the *muleta*.

Flamenco stood still watching him, then made a sudden charge, which Sebastian avoided. The *espada* came forward once more. He spoke a little to the bull as he approached—matadors often do—but the soft words did not penetrate to the barriers. The red flag fluttered out into the brilliant sunshine towards the bull, as he came thundering down. Sebastian scarcely moving his feet, swayed to one side, but Flamenco, as he hurtled past swerved also, and his long, left horn tore open the flesh of the *espada's* thigh.

There seemed to be no one near Sebastian at the moment, and in that moment Flamenco turned short to charge him again as he lay half stunned and struggling to rise from the ground. But before any of the toreros could reach him, the slight shape of the priest sprang forth from the barrier and flitted out across the sand. With a pass of his cloak, he drew the deadly

rush upon himself. The sight of the incongruous black figure seemed to strike the people breathless.

"*Ay di me!*" the good father," sobbed out a woman suddenly, "this demon of a bull will of a surety kill him!"

And this seemed not unlikely, for Flamenco charged furiously, head down, grunting, as he came. But in the same instant the fear of the spectators changed to a delirium of acclamation, for the priest with a little skimming movement, of nimble feet eluded the attack, and then the *chulos* came into play.

"*Suerte de la capa!*" yelled the crowd in ecstasy.

The priest extended his hand, and Sebastian scrambled to his feet, but, badly wounded as he was, he would not leave the ring. He stood uncertainly, then found his feet and waited for the bull.

As soon as his bloodshot gaze found Sebastian, Flamenco charged again. The young *espada* met him in full career and thrust, following with his body the lunge of the long blade.

Valentina covered her eyes, but the silence which hung over the vital moment broke up into a roar. "*Buen estoque!* Good thrust!"

And she looked again. The great bull was upon his knees, blood gulping from his mouth while between his shoulders protruded the hilt

of Sebastian's sword, which he had no longer strength to withdraw. He glanced round, as if he would have thanked the people for their applause, then fell full length beside the dying bull.

. . . . . .

It was twenty-six hours later. In the little lonely chapel far among the mountains a light burned. Don Jaimé had ridden many hours and by many rough paths to this remote place. From time to time he had threatened the half-dozen wild mountaineers, who forced his mule to its best pace, with all the penalties of the Spanish law. None heeded him, and none answered. Finally gagged, and with his hands bound, he was hustled in upon the outskirts of the congregation to witness the picturesque marriage ceremony going on within. Don Jaimé looked round. Never had the walls of any church inclosed such a gathering. On all sides wind-reddened swarthy men met his gaze. Away under the lights of the altar he could see the blue-eyed, black-haired bride, and Sebastian's worn, handsome face, bloodless, against the dusk.

Then it was over, the priest and his acolyte withdrew, and presently only three people beside himself remained, the young bride and bridegroom and a cloaked figure whose name Don Jaimé did not need to ask.

"Receive my blessing, my children," said Don Q., "as well as that which the good father has bestowed upon you. Here is part of my wedding-gift. This will enable you to live until your wound is healed, Sebastian, and you have won another step or two towards your ambition."

The young couple would have kissed his hands, praying blessings upon him. "None in all Spain is so great as my lord, so good to the poor ones!" they said.

"I trust so. I trust so, my children!" interrupted Don Q. "But, see, the remainder of my wedding gift stands yonder."

Sebastian turned his eyes in the direction indicated. He expected to see a mule, or perhaps a horse, but he met instead the angry stare of Don Jaimé. The gag had been taken from his mouth, and he broke into a flood of words.

"From all of which," said Don Q., as he paused, "I gather that you misapprehend the situation. Over your fate I claim no power. It rests entirely with Sebastian. As president of the *corrida*, you attempted by foul play to cause his death; and, further, you brought much discredit upon the whole practice of bull-fighting, a terrible crime in one who holds an official connection with the ring. Therefore, nothing now remains but for Sebastian to pro-

nounce your sentence, and for Gaspár and Robledo, who wait at the door, to carry it out. . . . What should you desire to be done with this person, Sebastian ? "

Valentina pulled her husband's sleeve, and the two whispered together for a moment, before Sebastian spoke.

" We would intreat my lord to advise us."

" That is very well said, Sebastian. Come, let us hold our little council together."

The three stood in the shadows out of earshot, whilst Don Jaimé cursed bitterly to himself. In a short time Don Q. clapped his hands, and two of his men entered.

" Don Jaimé," said the brigand, " you will be given the night in which to consider your sins before the shrine, but as soon as it is light enough for them to see the sights of their rifles my men will lead you out and clear Sebastian's account with you ! "

Don Jaimé heard the sentence as in a dream, as in a dream he saw the beautiful face of Valentina, inexorably cold, and Sebastian's expressionless acquiescence. He would have spoken if he could, but while he collected his thoughts they were gone.

. . . . . .

He was unbound and left to wear the long night through in the chapel. For hours he

walked up and down the narrow floor; again and again he drew himself up to the barred window and looked out at the almost motionless forms of his two guards, backed by the gaunt, moonlit sierra. During the early night an imprisoned bird fluttered and beat against the higher windows.

Purple dark had given place to moonlight, and the moonlight was waning when, utterly wearied out, he fell into a doze, from which he started awake with the dull knowledge of impending catastrophe. Already the bird was moving in the dusk of the roof, and a pale luminance in the air heralded the day. Soon it would be possible for the guards to see to shoot! With a catch at his breath, he stumbled to the window, but his eyes fell on vacancy —they were perhaps already in the porch! He crept to the door, and tried it softly. It was locked. Outside the sun changed the dawn-lights from green to orange. It was full day! . . . Oh, why did they not come and put an end to this dreadful expectancy?

As his eyes passed round the interior, they fell upon something which shone white against the dark wood of the door. A written paper and a key!

Don Jaimé held it up to the light now streaming in.

"Is is unlucky to marry and to kill within the same twenty-four hours. Therefore you are free; but, should you offend again, there will be no pardon."

Don Jaimé thrust the key into the door, opened it, and with the free wind on his face fell forward in a dead faint. The bird which had been his fellow prisoner flew out over his unconscious body into the sunlight of the morning.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOW DON Q. PLAYED SUBSTITUTE

THE years wore away, and as they passed the aspect of life changed under the eyes of Don Q. Old memories could never change; yet old duties, old interests which had held him with strong hands it seemed but yesterday, were weakening, fading, and leaving him free to a freedom lonelier than the bondage of the past.

For many weeks strange happenings had been taking place in the Boca del Lobo, events such as were unique in the history of the *sequestradores*. Day by day men were sent for to the cave of Don Q., and they came forth from it with set look and closed mouths, then

within the hour they departed, wearing the faces of men with a mission, down the mountains. One by one they went their way, until at last scarce a score of bandits were left by the fires; these talked much among themselves, but their conversations, carried on at every expedient interval, left them none the wiser. Of all the band, one only knew the purpose of Don Q., that one was Robledo, who on a certain windy evening heard it with a growing wonder.

"Robledo, my child," said Don Q., "have you ever been told of a country called Mexico?"

"Is it not the place, lord, where all men ride upon horses?"

"That is the place. I am going there."

"And my lord will return," said Robledo, with the air of a man stating an incontrovertible fact.

"It may be, Robledo; again it may be that I shall not return."

"I am ready, even at this instant, to accompany my lord," exclaimed the young mountaineer.

"That cannot be."

Robledo clenched his hands with a wild gesture. "I am again to be separated from my lord?"

"You will remain in Spain, Robledo."

The young, worn, handsome face blanched. "I cannot!"

"Not if I command?" inquired Don Q.

"If my lord commands, I will remain in Spain until he has gone."

"And then, Robledo?"

"I will leap from the Salto del Lobo. Who am I that I should live when my lord has departed?"

And what of Isabellilla, your wife?"

"She would be the first, lord, to point out the track to the Salto del Lobo!"

Don Q. paused for a moment. Anyone watching his frown would have thought he was about to repel Robledo, but as the silence lengthened, and as he looked upon the stricken face of the young man, his own grew softer than any in the sierra had ever seen it, the lines about the mouth passed away, and a fire almost of geniality burned in his eyes.

"I think we shall have to go together, after all, Robledo; we three, who have been linked together for so long."

Perhaps this is the single record of Don Q.'s unbending to one of his followers. At this, Robledo, carried out of himself, raised the shrill halloo of the Andalusian *cazador*. At once the frown settled back on Don Q.'s brows.

"You forget yourself strangely," said he. "Should such a thing occur again, I shall be compelled to beg you to take the path to the Wolf's Leap without delay."

It is hard to say when the idea of leaving the Spanish sierra first found footing in the mind of Don Q., but once there, during the long and lonely days and yet longer nights—for the brigand had suffered for years from insomnia—it grew stronger and more definite.

"I have long since reached the apex of my career," he wrote in his autobiography. "One by one those of my blood have ceased to need my surveillance. Many of my old enemies are dead. Yet I linger here surrounded by savage and illiterate men, and from time to time it comes to me that I can no longer support the desolation of my existence. From the endless battle which has raged between me and the authorities I can now retire with all the honours of war—at least from the arena of crag and peak, though not perhaps from the struggle of life. Over there, far away in the New World, if it possible that a career awaits me, if I bid farewell for ever to the sierra." So Don Q.

The days which followed found him in the vortex of orderly preparation that heralded his departure. Among many matters which claimed his attention, not the least was the collection by trusty hands for shipping out of Spain of the accumulation of treasures which during many years he had secreted in various

parts of the sierra. There were also a hundred cases of reward and payment punishment and discharge to occupy each waking hour. So it may be readily imagined that the last few weeks spent in the Boca del Lobo were among the busiest and most harassing of his whole career. But at length all was done, only a short dozen of men remained by the fires below the terrace, Gaspár, Grulla the Crane, Esteban, Drumio, and a few others. Robledo was already away upon his master's business, and then at last there came a morning when these men received each a warning and a reward before they filed out of their lord's sight, as he believed, for the last time. They marched to a camp that he had, as a measure of precaution, ordered them to keep up for one month at some miles' distance, and five hundred feet nearer heaven.

With noon a strange quiet brooded over the valley, in the sunlit hours which followed, a scattering of jays, emboldened by the unusual silence, flew out from among the pines to strut, and pry, and peck among the ashes of the dead fires; then came evening, with its chill wind whistling through the empty *chozas*. The lonely figure sat at the cave-mouth and looked down, for the brigand, in his relation to inanimate nature, was strangely enough something of a sentimentalist. So as the hours went by he

forgot the solitude he had endured, his mind dwelt more upon his hours of success, the exploits and achievements of decades of a guerrilla warfare, and upon the pleasures of companionship which he had enjoyed there. But whether it was with sorrow or with joy that he took his leave of the sierra no one will ever know. It is characteristic that upon this point his autobiography is silent.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW DON Q. PLAYED SUBSTITUTE—(*continued*)

THREE days later Don Q., all these thoughts shaken off, emerged among the vineyards, which here abut upon the foothills. In front of him stretched out all the possibilities of a new life, a life to be lived far away, a life in which he must exchange the pine for the palm. But he did not forget that uncounted chances of danger and of death lay between him and that future. Yet it was with a lightening heart that the brigand on his horse ambled slowly down the winding road. A shower had fallen, and awakened from the earth a hundred scents of sweetness and of growth. Far away across the grey olive-

groves and the vivid vine-tendrils, a new day was rising out of Africa.

It was his habit to travel by night and to lie up by day; but at this point of his journey he turned away from the vine-clad country to a desplodados of sandhills and undulating land, which had for the most part fallen out of tillage. But there were neglected woods still crouching in the hollows, and olives, old, gnarled, and forbidding, within broken hedges of cactus and prickly pear. Don Q. urged his horse to a gallop, for day was breaking into sunlight and although the district seemed deserted he knew that he had now left the wide sphere of his influence, where hundreds of *chozas*, *ventas*, and *posadas* sheltered each the head of an adherent.

Every mile as it dropped behind added now to the peril of his position. His destination was an old *casa de vinas*, a lodge about which once clustered a vineyard of repute, but that had long lain deserted. The building had been turned to his own uses by one Ramon, who kept an obscure inn, which, as a matter of fact, was little frequented save by smugglers, and by those who sought safety in seclusion. This Ramon was well known by Don Q., to whose intelligence department he had for years past supplied aid and information.

It has been often said that Don Q. had the

senses of a hunter. His long existence in the mountains, far from the dulling influences of civilised life, had sharpened his faculty of observation. Thus, as he cantered forward in the broadening day, he saw on the trampled sand of the roadside a tiny dark spot. He drew up his horse upon its haunches and dismounted swiftly, then, stooping, he found it to be a drop of blood still wet and crimson. He walked fifty yards before he found a second, and another thirty before an almost continuous trail drew him on and through a break in the cactus hedge, where under the dusty olive-trees, nearly hidden behind a thicket of thorns, he was aware of something, a patch of brown amidst the withered green of the thicket. Nothing moved as he pushed nearer, and a moment later he was standing beside the body of a man.

The man lay with his face buried in the crook of his arm, his legs outstretched in an ungainly sprawl. As he fell so he must have died, for his body was still warm. Don Q. turned him over. Wayside tragedies are not uncommon in a land where the passions rise to fever heat in a moment; but this Don Q. saw at a glance was no ordinary case of a quarrel and a murder.

Although he was dressed in the costume of a peasant, this fellow, with his heavy-featured face and reddish moustache, was no son of

Spain. Moreover, the man had been shot in the back. What could it mean? From the *faja*, which he wore Spanish fashion about his waist, peeped a glint of white; it proved to be the edge of a letter addressed to the señora Garcia, a name far from uncommon in Spain.

The dead man had evidently been a messenger, and it looked as if he had escaped from his assailants only to die in a thicket with his charge still safe in his possession. That he would be followed was certain, and Don Q., who had once before been to Ramon's, and thus knew something of the ground, determined to approach the *posada* from the back. He led his horse over a rocky ridge dipping into a wooded valley and a couple of hours later dismounted again to reconnoitre the house. From the angle at which he came upon it, it presented a white wall to the eye, blank save for a narrow-slatted window in a low tower which squatted on the roof. How closely connected with his own fate that window was yet to be he did not guess.

Leading his horse, he advanced quietly until he could tie the animal to the branch of a tree. Then with noiseless footstep he emerged from the wood and walked round to the front of the building.

A man, with an air of a town-dweller rather than that of a peasant, was shading his eyes

from the sun as he stared down the track which led past his door.

"Ramon," said Don Q., softly at his side.

The man started violently, and turned pale under the unwashed brown of his skin. There could be no question about the fact that Ramon was in a desperate fright.

"Vuesencia, excellency, you must fly!" his shifty eyes dropped before Don Q.'s.

The mystery was growing no clearer. "I will at the least drink some water from the *jarro*," said Don Q.

Ramon unhooked the porous four-mouthed jar from the wall, and the brigand, holding it high, poured a stream of cool water down his throat.

"Vuesencia, do not delay! There is great danger!" urged Ramon again.

"But the contrabandista I was to travel with, where is he? You expected me at this hour!"

"Even so, Vuesencia, therefore I looked for you on the road. Tolomé will not pass by to-day, for the Carbineers may arrive—and if it came about that my lord was captured in my poor house (which is his and all that is in it) I should never survive the memory."

"That, indeed, is more than probable," agreed Don Q., grimly. It was quite possible,

he thought, that the fellow had betrayed him, although he lacked courage to confront the moment when his treachery should be revealed.

"I will go with you into the house, for you must give me a handful of olives and some bread," said the brigand.

"No, no, Vuesencia, no; if you love your life!"

"Who have you within?" asked Don Q., harshly.

Ramon wrung his hands together. "None, lord."

Even as he spoke, Ramon stretched out an eloquent hand.

"They come, excellency! They come!" he cried, as he broke into a loud lamentation. "If you are captured in my poor house, Robledo and Gaspár will undoubtedly sharpen their knives for my body—"

But Don Q. took no heed of Ramon. His eyes were bent upon the road, along which a number of horsemen were galloping. He looked round. The inn stood upon bare, open ground, with no cover within three hundred yards of it. His horse was weary with a ride of thirty miles, he could not escape by riding. In a moment his plans were made. He did not know who these horsemen could be nor their object in coming there, and no time remained

in which to ask questions. Don Q. ran into the inn, stood for a moment glancing at his surroundings, then, perceiving a ladder which evidently communicated with a loft in the tower, he at once commenced to climb it. Beneath him Ramon said something which he could not catch. Don Q. snarled back a threat, flung open the trap-door, and sprang into the loft, letting the flap of the door fall to behind him.

He had expected to find the loft almost dark with perhaps a feeble glimmer of evening light coming through the fixed slats of the window. But, to his surprise, a lantern burned dimly in a far corner. He stopped and looked round, trying to pierce the gloom. The place seemed empty, save for a broken chair and a heap of dried grass at one side. A slight movement behind the lantern startled him.

" Who is there ? " he asked sharply.

The answer came at once. " I should rather ask who are you that intrude upon me in this manner ? " said a woman in good Spanish.

A woman ! The voice was clear, well bred, and haughty, but Don Q. stood silent for a second, for two facts met in his mind. The question had been put in good Spanish, but with the accent of a foreigner—the man he had left dead among the dry cactus leaves half-an

hour ago wore a Spanish dress, though he also was a foreigner.

"Ten thousand pardons, señora, I was told the loft was empty."

"Then the fellow down below has betrayed me."

"No, for I took the law in my own hands and came up here to escape from a party of people who are riding hard this way."

He could hear her catch a sharp breath in the darkness, but she spoke in a steady voice.

"Are they hunting you?"

"No; yet I prefer not to be seen. An idea strikes me. You are the señora, Garcia?"

"Why should you think so?"

"Because a letter addressed to you has just come into my possession. Read it quickly, for it has escaped the hands of your enemies, and we may be able to help each other, you and I, since we seem to be companions in misfortune."

Don Q. picked up the lantern and held it while she read. He saw a delicate young profile, shaded by heavy, fair hair, but the eyes she raised to his, when she finished the letter were dark, and, though she seemed little over twenty, they wore a look of settled sadness.

"Where is de Vassen? It was he who should have brought this to me."

"I fear you will not see him again. He was a brave man."

The noise of hoof-beats and loud voices outside interrupted him.

"Listen, señora; do you know who speaks?" He pointed downwards to the room below, where they could hear men moving with clanking spurs.

"She is here! We know she is here! Come, tell us without delay where she is hidden!" The tone was thick, with a hectoring accent.

"I do not understand, excellency." Ramon's reply sounded shaky enough.

Don Q.'s companion laid her hand on his arm. "That thick voice is Baron Yusiloff's. What shall I do?"

"Will you allow me to advise you? See, I will lie down behind the grass, and you must place the lantern near the trap-door, and when they come you will rush forward as if you expected de Vassen. They will need food and the horses rest before they take you away, and will probably let you stay up here alone; I may then be able to aid you. It is the only possible plan by which I can hope to escape notice."

"I swear to you, excellency, there is nobody here," Ramon was repeating drearily downstairs.

"Pah! the fool lies! She must be here, and de Vassen with her!" Yusiloff exclaimed.

"Here you, Alsin, search that room, I myself will attend to the loft."

The señora Garcia took the lantern. "Go, I will do what I can," she whispered.

Don Q. had hardly thrown himself down behind the hay when the trap-door was pushed up, and the head and shoulders of a big fat-faced man were thrust through in company with a huge hand holding a revolver.

The señora Garcia sprang forward. "Oh, is it you at last, de Vassen? Why did you not come sooner?" she cried.

Yusiloff laughed unpleasantly. "I am sorry to disappoint your highness, and to present to you only poor Franz Yusiloff, instead of the traitor, de Vassen, who, I have the happiness of informing your highness, is probably by this time dead!"

The lady stood silent while he shouted the news to his friends below.

"So we have found you," he added, as he raised himself through the door in the flooring. "So, so! I knew the innkeeper lied."

"To overtake a woman who has lost all her friends is a triumph to boast of, Yusiloff," she said, and Don Q. noticed that she spoke as a woman accustomed to the privileges of rank.

"At least my master will think it so," Yusiloff retorted.

"And now that you have discovered me?"

"We shall take you back again with us to

the paradise from which you escaped, madame," sneered Yusiloff, as he moved about the loft, tapping the beams that formed the shell of the tower, and almost treading upon Don Q. where he lay under the heap of grass.

"Do we start at once?" inquired the lady, coldly.

"No, madame, not even to suit your convenience. We must rest and eat. For the moment your place of refuge must become your prison."

He began to climb back clumsily through the trap-door and on to the ladder, but his head had hardly disappeared before he thrust it up once more.

"You are surprised that I should trust you alone, you who are so clever in escaping?" he said scoffingly. "Let me tell you why. There is not one man of your retinue left alive in Spain to aid you!"

The trap-door banged above his head, as the lady sank upon her knees beside the heap of grass.

"Do not move yet," she whispered, "for Yusiloff is very crafty. Wait until they begin to eat. He always overeats, and will be drowsy. Ah, señor, I knew it must come to this! I knew that I could never escape! My husband will be waiting for me at Gibraltar; and what

will he do when he hears that they have taken me back again? Oh, it is too hard to bear!"

"Where would they take you, madame, these men?"

"To the prison from which I escaped. They call it the Convent of the Sacred Cross. It is not a convent, it is an asylum, where the inmates are not mad; their one offence is that they stand either by birth or marriage within the inner ring of royalty. The tragedy of my life is known to the world because I attempted to escape two years ago. It was Yusiloff then who captured me! Without him the others are nothing."

Don Q. made no answer. He knew now who she was, this girl of a noble family, whom a prince of the proudest royal house in Europe had married. He seemed to be forgiven, his wife was received at Court. It was soon suggested that he should go on a voyage half round the world. The invitation was no less than a command. Long months passed over but he would not return, for false news had been sent to him that his wife had become mad. How she had attempted to escape and failed was a story told by every newspaper in the world.

Don Q. moved quietly. "You must not fail again, señora," he said.

Although it had been clear day when Don

Q. reached the *casa de vinas*, the evening had now fallen and was rapidly deepening into night. In the tower-loft the lantern still faintly lit the warm dusk, and soon the air was penetrated with the odours of cooking and of wet dust, as the party below prepared for their meal, while one or two of the servants watered the horses outside.

"Ah, señor, I have no hope. My enemies are too strong for me. Yusiloff will carry me back, and I shall be shut up for all my life in the Convent of the Sacred Cross—those four dreary walls beside a dreary Belgian river. My husband gave up everything to marry me; we only wanted to be happy together, Ferdinand and I."

"Do not lose hope, madame," said Don Q., very gently.

"Can I help it? They have killed poor de Vassen; you heard Yusiloff say it. And there is no one else."

"All the world sympathises with you."

She laughed bitterly. "Yes, the newspapers took up my case; they all meant well, they were all sorry, and they did me the greatest dis-service—no enemy could have done more against me!"

"Ah, I understand. Your portraits, madame! Even I myself—"

"You knew me at once señor, that is what

you would say? Alas, yes, my photograph was published over half the world. There lies my worst peril—that is why I find it so hard to escape; everyone can recognise me."

"Nevertheless, do not give up hope."

"Oh," she cried, "I would rather fall into the hands of Don Q., the brigand of the mountains, than into Yusiloff's. He would treat me better."

"I am very certain that he would do so," said Don Q.

"My one hope is that we may all of us be captured by his outposts."

Don Q. shook his head sadly. "I fear that cannot be," he said.

"Why not?" she cried.

"Because his outposts are no longer in their places."

"You take from me my last hope."

"Not quite the last," said Don Q. "For, although his outposts are withdrawn, pray accept the man himself as your champion." He bowed to the ground, and señora Garcia, who had heard, as, indeed, who in Spain had not, of the exploits of the lord of the mountains, stared at him in wonder and not a little fear.

"You Don Q.?" she cried. "You that terrible man? Oh, it is impossible!"

"And why, madame, is it not possible?"

"Señor," she faltered, "your sympathy. . . ."

"Ah, madame, it has been my fate to draw my sword in many a good cause. Never, however, in a better than that in which it is now bare."

The enemies of Don Q. may find many a fault in the woof of his character; nor is that wonderful, since it had been woven in such wild scenes as few have lived through. But the fact cannot be denied that he possessed a quality of sympathy and understanding such as is shared by few. His companion laid her hand upon his arm.

"It is whispered in the plains that you are about to leave the mountains and your old mode of life. Have you repented of your determination?"

"Madame," said Don Q., "I never repent I am even now on my way to the coast."

"And you would stay and risk all your future for a woman of whom two hours ago you knew nothing? You must not do it! I cannot allow it. I will not drag others with me, and certainly not you, señor, out of the sunlight of life!"

"Do not fear for me, madame. I have known little sunlight for many years, and"—his tone altered—"I have sent enemies more brave and more dangerous than yours into the darkness."

His companion was about to speak again, but he motioned her to be silent.

"If my presence displeases you," he said, "I will go down the ladder at once, and see if I cannot for my own convenience reduce the number of your enemies. I will do this because I understand clearly that you do not look upon me as a worthy champion."

"You are wrong! You are wrong! I have met many men who pride themselves on chivalry, but I could not wish for any in distress a worthier champion than yourself."

"And I could pray for no other epitaph," returned Don Q. "Come, madame, let us take counsel together, and I foresee that your charity will soon be enlisted in paying for masses for the soul of the chief of your enemies."

It must be remembered that these words sounded not in the ears of the ordinary woman of to-day, but in those of a girl, who had seen many sad things in her short life, for the clock of the seventeenth century has not yet ceased to strike in Central Europe. Therefore it was with a sigh of relief, which in itself showed how great the tension had been, that she, who called herself señora Garcia, now finally capitulated, and rested her future actions upon Don Q. He, on his part, assumed at once that air of cheerfulness which always came to him in

moments of action. Gone was the little dark misanthrope, who had wended his way through the bleak bridlepaths of the mountains ; it almost seemed as if another man had taken his place.

He signed to her to follow him to the window, and with the lantern began to examine the slats which filled up the opening. Each one was fixed, and it looked as if it would take a good hour's work to remove them. But immediately he set to the task, while his companion held the light as he sawed at the wood with his knife. They had to move and work with caution for the old timbers under their feet acted as sounding-boards, so that some time elapsed before the cool breeze of the night blew in upon them. No word passed between them, though scraps of talk from the room below floated up to them through the cracks of flooring.

" I say, Baron, had we not better send a man out to keep watch on the horses ? "

" Mind your own business, Alsin ! There is no one left to run away with her highness now that de Vassen is dead," came Yusiloff's reply. " Let the fellows rest, when we start we must ride fast."

Meanwhile, as each slat was loosened, it was placed softly on the floor, until at length Don Q. peered out and pointed across the broad open space, all misty with starlight, which lay

between the house and the bluish-black background of a wood.

"Do you see that light far away?" he said. "It is in a farmhouse on the lower shoulder of the great mountain, Sabio Blanco. . . . That light must be your guide. . . . I shall endeavour to let you down from this window without attracting the attention of these rascals down below. It is risky, but I see no other way."

"Let us go at once," replied the girl, steadily.

"But listen, señora. You will find my horse in the wood; mount him and ride downhill out of the wood, then make straight towards the light and you will come upon a broad road that approaches the farmhouse. Half-way along this road it is joined by a track that leads away to the right; follow it until you reach a *choza* of reeds in the heart of a coppice. At this time of year it is deserted. Rest there and wait for me."

"Why will you not come now?" she said.

"Because your escape would at once be discovered. They have been reassured by hearing us moving. It is necessary that I stay while you gain a good start."

"I cannot go and leave you here."

"I fear that you have no choice," said Don Q., "for otherwise we shall be taken together. When you are safe I shall make my escape.

If you will not think of yourself, I beg you to consider me."

She took him by the hand.

"You are generous," she said. "Well, I go, and if I escape and reach the place of which you have told me I will wait for you there."

Without further delay Don Q. twisted his cloak into a rope, and, by the aid of a loop made of his coat, he lowered his companion to the ground. Then he watched her as she stole away through the starshine and faded into the shadows of the wood.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW DON Q. PLAYED SUBSTITUTE—(*continued*)

Don Q. with a light step crossed the floor, and looked down through a crack in the boards upon the scene beneath.

The meal was long since finished, and beside the broken pieces which remained half the company were sleeping in their chairs. Evidently they had ridden both far and fast.

At one end of the table, however, Yusiloff and another man were carrying on a conversation, and almost the first words which Don Q. was destined to hear proved to him the necessity

and wisdom of the step he had taken in remaining behind.

"I do not hear her moving," said Yulisoff.

"Bah, she is tired and sleeps. She cannot escape."

Still, I take no risks. It would go ill with us if we failed."

At the words Don Q. rose, and began to pace up and down, down and up, in imitation of the step of the señora Garcia. The manœuvre had its effect, for the sullen murmuring of voices showed that Yusiloff, his suspicions lulled into security, had renewed his conversation.

Meantime the night wore on, the moon rose and shone above the trees, the eagle-owl alone of living things sent forth his raucous voice over the sleeping world. Two hours and more passed, and already Don Q. had begun to think that the time had come to follow, when a noise of trampling sounded below, and then Yusiloff's voice, "Go on with the men, Alsin; I will follow with Madame." Don Q. knelt down to take a final look into the room beneath. What he saw caused him to start back in surprise.

Yusiloff was alone. Cautiously and silently, he was collecting all the furniture into one great heap, having first removed the ladder which communicated with the loft. His intention was plain he intended to burn the *posada*, and

in it the woman he believed to be imprisoned in the room above.

Don Q. did not wait for an instant. He stepped out upon the roof, and, fixing his fingers in the eaves, dropped to the ground. The drop was a long one, and he fell somewhat heavily, but struggled quickly to his feet. Looming large in the moon-mist, and tied to a hook in the wall, were the two horses intended for Yusiloff and his prisoner. He cut one clear, and led it away. A hundred yards from the inn he mounted and rode round to the front, and for several minutes sat in the saddle awaiting the development of the situation. Everything was silent, save that in the distant wood the eagle-owl still gave forth his wild cry.

At length against the background of starry sky, a plume of smoke crept upwards, followed by a stronger one, and then by a burst of flame. The door of the *posada* was flung open, and Yusiloff dashed forth. Don Q. fully realised the dastardly nature of the man's stratagem and stood ready to pluck the vengeance which was ready to his hand. He came out from the darkness like some Spirit of Destruction, and met the big man as he rushed from the shell of the burning inn. He carried a revolver in his hand, and as he ran he exchanged shots with Don Q. Both men hit their mark, but

whereas Yusiloff's bullet passed through the top of Don Q.'s shoulder, the one which he received in return brought him to a stand. He spun half round on his heels and fell tearing at the gound with his fingers. Don Q. turned, and without troubling to look at his antagonist rode away in the direction of Sabio Blanco.

. . . . . .

It was morning before Don Q. arrived at the path which led to the deserted *choza*. The wound in his shoulder had begun to burn and ache so severely that he was hard put to it to ride the last leagues of his way. With a sigh of relief he recognised the figure of señora Garcia in the low door-way.

"Oh," she cried, "so you have escaped them? What is the use of words? I shall never forget the service you have done me."

"I beg you will not speak of it. In an hour a certain Tolomé, a contrabandista, will be here. He will conduct you across the mountains to Gibraltar and to freedom."

"And you, what of you?"

"As to me," said Don Q., "with your permission, I will continue the journey into the course of which your Serene Highness brought so pleasant an interruption."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HOW THE END CAME

For many days Don Q. had lain sick in the shelter of the woods which clothe the eastern slope of Sabio Blanco. He had been wounded at the *posada* of Ramon ; the bullet had splintered the bone of his left shoulder, and he had barely been able to gain the shelter of the woods. There could be no doubt he was very ill, by the time that his trusted servant, Robledo, travelling to meet him, had seen far away a wisp of smoke steal up against the lemon-coloured dawn, followed by a second smoke, and had made speed to obey the signal. Thirty hours later he found his master.

It was fortunate for Don Q. that it was Robledo who thus found him, for the shock of the wound, the heat of the sun, and the hours of exposure had done their work, and the brigand was far gone in delirium. When Robledo chanced upon him he was sitting beside a fire of leaves and twigs in the grip of his temporary madness. A pine-marten from his hole in a decaying tree looked down upon the man who had invaded his solitude with wondering eyes, and already a vulture had signalled to his fellows across

the ether that matters which might be of ultimate interest to his kind were devoloping in the warm darkness of the woods below.

Now, Robledo *el cazador* had slain many an ibex upon the great mountain of Sabio Blanco, so that neither its woods nor its rocks held any secrets from him. He lifted his master's light weight in his sinewy arms, and, having stamped out the fire, passed higher up the mountain with his burden. Upon the very rim of the timber-line he built a shelter of branches, thatched it with moss, performed such rough surgery as he was capable of, and there and then commenced his wrestle with Nature for Don Q.'s life.

To describe in detail the succeeding days would be tedious. Twice Robledo went down the mountain, and each time the farmers of the foothills were forced to lament his coming in loss of stock. Kids and fowls he raided, and a water-skin full of milk. It proved the resource of the man that at his second visit he caught and carried off a milch goat, which he conveyed, protesting, across the saddle of his mule to his camp under the very brow of Sabio Blanco.

At first all Robledo's nursing had but a disappointing result. Day by day Don Q. grew weaker and weaker, took little nourishment

and was alternately assailed with paroxysms of dry heat and fits of devastating ague. The meat diet on which he was forced to subsist inflamed his wound, and the reaction lowered his vitality. Indeed, the arrival of the milch goat was the event from which may be dated the improvement in his condition. Once he had turned the corner, however, his progress was both swift and satisfactory.

But with his improvement a new factor came into the scheme of his life. The farmers began to notice the depredations of Robledo, depredations which at first they had been satisfied to place to the account of accident, or to the agency of the two or three families of lynxes which eked out their existence among the crags and thickets of the mountain. But, at length, when it became necessary for Robledo to "borrow" a couple of warm *capas*, a saucepan of iron, and sundry bags of flour, the farmers began to suspect that the creatures of prey had been reinforced from the ranks of humanity.

Fortunately for the two outlaws, the mind of the Spanish farmer of the *despoplados* works slowly. *Mañana*—to-morrow, is still the most hardworked word in their vocabulary, and beyond the fact that they reloaded the old muzzle-loading guns which hung upon their walls, they took for the moment no other

definite step, and this omission of theirs had doubtless an important bearing upon the course of events.

No sooner had the fever left his frame than Don Q. began to mend rapidly, so that the time soon came when he was able to talk to Robledo, and to discuss plans for the future.

"Had it not been for this wound of mine, both you and I would in all probability be upon the ocean and already nearing the coasts of Mexico. Should you be glad, Robledo?"

"I desire to be where my lord is," answered the young mountaineer.

"In truth I believe you do, Robledo. But when one has lived such a life as yours has been, one is apt to find an existence lived under the shadow of the law a trifle insipid. At least, so I should imagine," continued Don Q., speaking more to himself than to his companion, "though, indeed, I do not speak from experience. But my words are, I fear, a little above your intelligence, my child; yet I think you will understand me if I sum up the matter in a proverb: 'No meat is as sweet as that which one poaches from the land of an enemy.' Is not that your opinion?"

"Yes, lord," said Robledo with fervour. Before he became a brigand, or, indeed, afterwards, the *cazador* had rarely missed an oppor-

tunity of poaching a deer or a bustard from the neighbouring estates. A passion for illegitimate sport burned unappeasably in his blood.

Don Q. sighed. Then in his characteristic manner he brushed away speculation and began to address himself to the problem of the moment.

"In a very few days I shall be strong enough to travel. To-morrow you will go to Castelleno and arrange with Tolomé, the contrabandista, that we meet him in the defile of the Black Pine Trees."

"Yes, lord."

"Tolomé will conduct us across the further passes. We will take boat in one of those small bays which lie at the foot of the cliffs and arrive by night in the harbour of Gibraltar. Once there we can embark for England, and from England to Mexico is merely an affair of days. You will arrange, Robledo, that we meet Tolomé on the night of Friday. It cannot be sooner, for my strength is not yet whole, and it must not be later, because of the waning moon. We shall need her light to show us the path over the passes. And now make up the fire, fill the jars with water, and when I wake to-morrow be six leagues upon your way."

CHAPTER XXXV

HOW THE END CAME—(*continued*)

In the town of Castelleno, upon the outskirts of the poor quarter, is a little desolate street that possesses a very evil reputation. The dwellers in this street seem never to sleep, or if they do so they choose unusual hours. Often when the rest of the town is overlaid with a mantle of silence, the brown dust of the Calle San José is disturbed by the hoofs of mules, and its echoes softly wakened by the contrabandista's password.

About one o'clock in the small hours of Wednesday morning Robledo, afoot and leading his mule, crossed the wooden bridge which gives upon this street. He passed on the left-hand side of the open drain, which flows down the centre of the road. The choir of bull-frogs in the valley behind him sent up their "koax, koax," to the stars. Robledo knocked a couple of times in a peculiar manner upon the door of one of the houses. A man opened it. A few words passed, and Robledo found himself in a large, low apartment considerably below the level of the street.

A brazero in one corner sent forth a glow

against the ruddy background, of which one or two figures were discernible. A few kegs with some square cases, which, to the initiated eye, could contain nothing but tobacco, littered the floor.

Tolomé hesitated, then spoke.

"We have here," he said, "the makings of much trouble were we discovered. If you were to walk in the Calle and make up your mind concerning the weather—"

Robledo bowed, and took the hint. He considered it had been coarsely conveyed. Tolomé, of course, wanted to secrete his spoils in some hiding-place, and equally he did not wish Robledo to learn where that hiding-place was. But both were men who lived in defiance of the Spanish law, and, as such, were both subject to a certain unwritten code of honour.

"Does the hill-thief think that I would betray his house and salt," muttered Robledo, "that he turns me thus into the street? If I were here upon my own business I should give him a lesson."

The particular form which Robledo's lesson would have taken can be guessed. In the Calle San José such are given only with the knife. But Robledo remembered in time that he was the messenger of Don Q., and he had served the brigand too long to dream of turning aside

from his commands to dally with a merely personal affair. So when at length Tolomé sought him in the moonlight, with profuse apologies, Robledo waved his hand, remarked: "It is less than nothing," and entered the house, where at once the two fell to business.

Of all that they said it is necessary to set forth but little. Suffice it that one spoke few words and the other yet fewer, that they conversed in a language hard to understand owing to the strange slang which makes up three-fourths of the contrabandista's daily vocabulary, and that half-an-hour had not gone over their heads before Robledo's errand was complete, and Tolomé had arranged to be at the rendezvous appointed by Don Q. early on the night of Friday.

Now fate so ordered that while Robledo was talking with Tolomé in the Calle San José, Sub-Lieutenant Gregorio Merou, of the Carbineerss was stationing his score of men in the shadow, outside it.

This Merou was a hard, short man, chiefly remarkable for a mouth which seemed to suck all his words inwards. He wore, also, large round spectacles, which hid a pair of dismal, unfriendly eyes. Such was the outward appearance of Gregorio Merou, yet it is but fair to say that his record belied it. He had risen from the ranks, and had been concerned in the

famous capture of the gipsy Salto in the Pyrenees; later he had been transferred to Andalucia, where he at once had set himself, with all the cold and passionless, yet immutable determination inherent in his character, to break up the many bands of smugglers and petty footpads which infested the district.

It was some time—though Tolomé was unaware of the fact—since the pale eyes behind the spectacles had first dwelt upon his doings. But from the moment they did so the goings out and comings in of the smuggler had become a source of continual interest to Merou.

"There rides the man who shall bring me my full lieutenancy," the Carbineer reflected, and he began to watch for an opportunity to take Tolomé red-handed. That opportuinty had at length come. All day and all through the early night Merou and his men had ridden hard on the track of the contrabandistas, and now they were but awaiting a signal to crown the affair with a capture. Merou, indeed, had already pressed the official whistle to his teeth when Robledo, having said his farewell, stepped out into the night.

The events of the next few moments included a struggle, in the course of which the brazero was overturned, and knives and bludgeons did their work in the dark. But the odds of

twenty to two made the result a foregone conclusion, so that when a candle of fat was lighted, its radiance shone over the complete victory of the law. Thereupon followed the searching of the house. Contraband goods were hauled from their shy retirement, and set forth in a damning array upon the earthen floor. Merou took an inventory of them in his methodical fashion, while the wife of Tolomé, a dark, dishevelled Toledan girl, wept noisily and fiercely from the stool by the brazero.

At length Merou, having finished his task, crossed the room and stood looking down at his captives.

"Here, one of you," he ordered, turning to his men, "bring the light so that we may see what birds we have caught in my net. Ah, you, Tolomé! But who is this? I don't know this fellow's face." He touched Robledo with his foot. "Your name?" he demanded.

Robledo made no reply. He knew from experience that the less a man says when he speaks with the law the better it is for himself.

There followed a silence, during which Merou's attention was attracted by the dry sobbing of the woman beside the brazero. Suddenly she rose to her feet, and came slowly forward.

"What are you going to do with my husband?" she demanded in a dazed voice.

Merou pointed to a corner of the room where one of his men was nursing a wounded shoulder.

"That was your husband's work," he said grimly. "If the man dies—But that is unlikely. And so, I think, it will be Ceuta—ten or perhaps fifteen years of Ceuta, the convict-prison in Africa."

The officer paused. In spite of his own habitual silence he always encouraged his prisoners to speak. He was well aware that in the horror of the early moments of arrest tongues are apt to be loosened, and not once but many times he had profited by the fact.

"We have only been married three weeks," cried the Toledan. "You will take him to Ceuta, and I shall never see him again. Ai! Ai! Will nothing soften your heart?"

Merou smiled icily. "Nothing will make me forego my duty."

"Nothing?" said Tolomé, suddenly.

"Nothing that you can offer."

"Do not be too sure of that."

A tone in his prisoner's voice arrested the attention of Merou.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Suppose," said Tolomé, "I were to offer you a prisoner in exchange for myself, a man beside whom I am nothing. A man whose capture would bring you a captaincy!"

"There is only one man in Spain, if, indeed, he be still in Spain, whose capture would bring me that," said Merou, quietly.

"And if I show you how to take that man?"

"Tolomé," cried Robledo suddenly, "you are mad! What is your life that you should—"

"Silence!" snarled Merou. "But, pah! I waste time. How should you be able to do what you boast of? Besides it is reported that Don Q. has escaped out of Spain. What have you to say to that?"

"He is escaping. He has not yet escaped."

"How do you know?"

"Because this evening there came one with a message to me from Don Q. The message commanded me to meet him at—at a certain place from which I was to conduct him across the mountains."

"Who brought the message?"

"Robledo," answered Tolomé, flinging the last shreds of compunction to the winds. "Robledo! His servant. Now do you believe me? Now will you let me go free? Ah! Keep him off! Keep him off!"

At the words, in spite of his bonds, Robledo had hurled himself upon the traitor, striking and kicking him as the two rolled together in the dust.

In an instant the troopers had dragged them

apart. As they did so Robledo spat full in Tolomé's face.

" I spit in the face of a traitor ! Early may it decay in death!" said the young brigand, bitterly.

It was thirty-six hours later, and each one of the hours seemed to Robledo an intrinsic part of a long and very evil dream. After he attacked Tolomé in the house in the Calle San José, he was taken outside while the smuggler spent the better portion of an hour in talk with Merou. What passed between them Robledo did not know, but presently Merou came out from the inner room, his usually expressionless face lit with excitement. As he walked he muttered, " What a hand to play ! Oh, what a hand ! "

A dozen minutes were occupied in an ague fit of preparation, and then at a word of command a couple of troopers bound Robledo upon a mule, and the whole party, including Tolomé, mounted and passed away out of the sleeping town. Dawn, which surprised the cavalcade upon a lonely road in the *despoplados*, also discovered to Robledo the main details of the trap which was to be laid for Don Q. The dozen Carbineers, who formed the Sub-Lieutenant's command, had divested themselves of their uniforms and assumed instead the gaudy dress

of sierran contrabandistas. Evidently the scheme was both simple and adequate. Don Q., suspecting nothing, would be at the rendèzvous in the defile of the Black Pines, and he would walk unsuspecting into the hands of his enemies. Robledo groaned when he thought of it, passed the time sullenly in killing Tolomé in imagination by various and dreadful deaths, and filled in the intervals of these dreams with strange fierce little prayers to such saints as he thought were best fitted to help him in his need. He was a man of the hills, knowing little of the great world.

So the time went by, and hour by hour, as the party wound deeper and deeper into the sierra, Robledo began to wonder more and more what part in the forthcoming drama he himself had been cast for. Why had they brought him? But as to this he remained ignorant until the final hours of the Thursday night.

That evening the Carbineers camped in a wood some five miles distant from the defile of the Black Pines. Through the trees Robledo could see the white head of the mountain Sabio Blanco. He had been fastened to a log, and as he lay counting the stars between the tree-tops, the young mountaineer broke suddenly into song. The words which he sang had long

been popular upon the country-side where years before a belief had become current that the man, if ever there came to be such an individual, who killed or captured Don Q., would have to deal with those powers of darkness to whom the brigand was supposed to owe and pay a sinister allegiance. This is a rough translation of the words of the legend which Robledo sang :

> " And *he* shall never know again
> The joys of sunlight or of rain.
> *He* nevermore shall see his wife.
> The darkness closes, and his life
> Is forfeit to the ghost and ghoul. . . ."

So far had Robledo gone when Merou leaped up from his place by the bivouac, strode across to the singer, commanding silence. Robledo perforce broke off while Merou scowled down at him.

" I have heard those words before," he said, " why do you sing them now ? "

" It may be that you will hear them again. As to why I sing them I do not know. They came to me, as it were, out of the darkness."

The Carbineers had clustered round. One or two crossed themselves.

" Other things come to me also," said Robledo. " It seems to me that I hear voices singing for the souls of the dead, and I see seven black crosses . . ."

" Two will be enough," said Merou in his cold voice. " One for the old panther and one for you.'

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW THE END CAME—(*continued*)

WHETHER it was due to the words of Robledo or to other causes, such as the excitement of the preceding hours, one thing is certain, the party that two hours later passed into the defile of Black Pines was strung to a nerve-breaking tension. In front rode Tolomé, and as he neared the mouth of the gorge he gave the musical and peculiar call which is the shibboleth of outlawry. They paused for an answer. On all sides under the moon rose the grim, black crags which could have hidden an army.

The night had fallen quite still, so still that far away upon Sabio Blanco the strange cry of a questing lynx sounded like a whispered incitement to the deeds of the hour. Beyond that there was no answer. Once again Tolomé lifted up his voice and sent his call and signal climbing the crags, and once again the party in the gut of the defile held their breath and waited.

In those slow seconds Robledo, gagged and bound, hoped against hope. But, alas! this time the signal was answered, and a figure rose from its lair in the rocks above them. Robledo

recognised and watched it with an agony of solicitude.

"Tolomé!" cried the voice of Don Q.

"I am here, lord," answered the traitor.

"Good," said the voice from the cliff. "But where is Robledo?"

"By——, the villain is suspicious. There's but one way." Merou tore the gag from Robledo's mouth and thrust a pistol-barrel into his back. "Shout that all's well. Shout! Wave your hat! Send your voice to him! Do it, and you shall go free, like Tolomé! Refuse, and I blow you in pieces!"

Robledo worked his dry and shrunken tongue round his mouth. For ten full seconds an intense and monstrous silence gloated above the drama.

Then Robledo found his voice, and sent it ringing in harsh and whistling cadence up the cliffs. The words he used are not known nor ever will be. Each teller of the tale gives them a different rendering. But one thing is certain.

As the message which Robledo shouted came to the ears of Don Q., a reply rang back: "Bravely, my child, bravely!" and a sudden smile gleamed out upon the worn face of the young mountaineer as his shattered body fell forward upon his mule.

For a little space the Carbineers did not

move. The involuntary pause was their unintentional tribute to the manner of Robledo's death. Merou was the first to recover himself. He shouted out orders. At the same instant from the strip of brushwood upon the rugged hillside a bullet was sent upon its way. Then another. Tolomé pitched forward from his saddle and lay drumming his heels upon the hard road.

"Open order!" roared Merou. "Open out! Up the hill! Up the hill! There he goes. Shoot! Shoot!"

The figure of Don Q. had shown for an instant, to be saluted by a volley. He seemed to stagger.

"He's down! He's hit!" shouted the Carbineers, as their blue, jagged shadows disappeared in the dusk of the woods.

But, though it was quite true that a stray ball from Merou's revolver had given Don Q. a flesh-wound in the thigh, the brigand did not slacken speed.

An anger such as he had not known since first he came into the mountains burned and scalded him. As he ran, the scene and circumstance of Robledo's death shone before his eyes. He climbed upwards and upwards. Below and behind him echoed the noises of the pursuit, the crack of sticks and the duller voice of stones as they crashed and leaped down the mountain.

Don Q. was still weak from his long illness, but his was a frame which drew its pith rather from the spirit than the flesh. There was one spot which he desired to win. Escape by running was impossible. The wound in his thigh threw out upon the leaves and roots a scarlet advertisement of his path.

To stop was to court certain death, and, although death had never possessed great terrors for the grim old brigand, upon the manner of it he was ever an epicure. All his life he had had a strange horror of the idea of his body falling into the hands of his foes. He had also a distinctly classical preference for passing to the underworld with a goodly company of his enemies. So he ran onward and upward, until he entered a patch of blasted pines, making always for the caves upon the eastern side of the mountain, where were many such in a great sandstone cliff.

One there was in particular, a cavern known as the Wolf's Hole, so called because of some legend of old Moorish days. Could he but gain this place. Ah! then he might turn upon the pursuers. Then, with the solid rock to guard his back, he might fight a fight that would remain in the minds of men!

So he ran on and ever on, but even in his flight the scarred old wolf snapped disastrously

back over his shoulder. Once and again he paused, and, resting his rifle against a tree, fired at the leaders of the chase. At the third shot a cry told him that the number of his enemies had grown less. Then on again.

Presently Don Q. ran out of the shelter of the final wood and began to cross a boulder-strewn and arid upland. His strength was failing, and he no longer dared wait to fire on his pursuers. They, too, had learned caution. No longer did the chase tail out with pride of place belonging to the swiftest, now they advanced evenly and steadily in open order, seven men, covering a hundred yards of the hillside. Every half kilometre, at a word of command, they sank upon their left knees and fired a volley.

Now the great sandstone cliff was but half a mile away, the caves dark as wounds upon its shining face; now it was a matter of but a hundred yards; now the stumbling figure of Don Q. showed clearly against it, to the echoes of a final volley. How the component parts of that volley failed in their work must remain a mystery. The range was short, the mark clear. Perhaps each trooper hoped that his comrade's bullet would do the deed, and that upon his comrade's head would fall the curse "of ghost and ghoul."

However that may have been, a moment

later Don Q.'s shadow, grotesquely monstrous, black as spilled ink, towered up on the cliff with outstretched arms like a welcoming demon ere the brigand's footsteps echoed across the threshold of the cave. Lying there panting, he gulped wine from his flask, and proceeded to take stock of his surroundings.

The hole through which he had crawled, for it was little more, made a circular tunnel in the rock. Behind him stretched the vast aisles of the cave, unexplored by man, at least in this generation.

Outside he could hear his enemies talking.

"He has gone to ground," said a voice.

"He ran like an ibex," said another.

"We ought to have killed him with our last volley."

Then came the cold tones of Merou, still a little distressed by running.

"Here, Cifuentes, you know the mountain. What of this cave?"

"It is called the Wolf's Hole," said Cifuentes.

"Yes," remarked a voice from inside, the voice of Don Q., "it is called the Wolf's Hole, and the wolf is waiting."

"Ah," cried Merou. "And we are coming to kill the wolf."

"Good!" said Don Q.

There followed a consultation outside, and the noise of men running.

Then a shuffling in the tunnel. Don Q. struck a match and held it in his left hand above his head. In his right he grasped his rifle by the barrel.

"It's no bigger than a burrow," said a voice. The shuffling ceased.

Evidently the explorer had repented of his hardihood. The match in Don Q.'s fingers went out.

At last, after several minutes of silence, the noise within the tunnel was resumed, and presently a head was thrust from beneath the penthouse of rock. Don Q.'s iron-shod rifle-butt fell on it with a crash. "For Robledo," he cried in a great voice.

Immediately a second trooper leaped from the tunnel firing as he came. His bullet crashed into the rock. Don Q. had no time to put his rifle to his shoulder. He pressed it against his mark and drew the trigger. The smell of singed cloth rose heavy on the air.

The ominous sounds which had followed their companions' entry into the cave were not without their effect upon those outside.

Merou's voice said :

"You next, Cifuentes."

"It's death, but here goes ! "

"Stop! Here is the wind. We have him now," cried Merou in exultation. And he rapidly whispered some orders.

Half-an-hour passed, during which the silence was broken only by footsteps, and the occasional casting of heavy weights to the ground. Don Q. peered forth. He could see nothing. Evidently the hole had been closed. He lit another match and looked round. Behind him the cave stretched back into the bowels of the mountain. There was no escape for him in that direction.

Even as he turned his nostrils were assailed by the first whiffs of smoke. He understood now. The wind must have risen in the east, and his foes were collecting wood to make a smoke under cover of which they might enter the cave. As the fire gained hold the wind drove the smoke down the tunnel as through a narrow chimney, and with the smoke came the Carbineers.

Wrapped as they were in that armoury of vapour, Don Q. could not see them, and the first that he knew of their presence was the face of one of them within ten inches of his own. Then began a battle in the smoke—a battle in which no man could see his foeman's face, and in which Don Q. shone pre-eminent. All were *his* enemies. He, at least, could make

no mistake. Whenever a form loomed up in front of him he attacked it. As he fought, too, he cried out the names of his followers, living and dead, Esteban and Grulla, Drumio and Gaspár, and he answered himself in their voices. Confusion seized the Carbineers. They fought with their companions, coughing and shouting in the smoke. The smell of powder added its sour reek to the rawness of burning wood. Then by degrees, each by each, the medley of voices sank away until but a single one was left.

"Bernardo! Martinez!" it cried and other names of its comrades. It was the voice of Cifuentes, the trooper who had seen Don Q. in the smoke, and whose knee had been broken in the fight. At last it also was silent, for the man grew afraid.

The following is taken from the sworn statement of this same Cifuentes, which he made before the court-martial that inquired into the affair.

"I ceased shouting," said Cifuentes in his statement, "because none answered, and I feared that the brigands would slay me. It was about the hour of dawn that the smoke began to clear away, and presently the sun shone through the tunnel by which we had come. It shone yellow and very bright like a gigantic lamp. The smoke had cleared now,

all save a little which clung about the ground. In this, like islands in a lake, lay the bodies of those who had fallen. I could count six such. I dragged myself to where they lay. First there was Rodriguez and near him Bernardo. I think they must have shot each other in error in the smoke. Then I came to Martinez. He lay alone. He had met his death by the knife. By the body of Martinez I paused awhile, wondering that the brigands did not return, but presently I crawled on farther, and there was my officer Gregorio Merou. He lay upon his face and his hands were soiled with dust. He was dead also. When I looked closer I started back in horror, for the wound through which his life had passed was in the root of the back, such a wound as he himself had given to the brigand Robledo in the valley. I was astonished that I did not find any of the brigands, and then I understood that there could have been but one brigand, Don Q., and that he had called upon the names of his comrades, deceiving us to our deaths. At length I turned round to find his body also, but it was not there; only I came upon a trail of blood leading through the tunnel. So I crawled, following it out into the morning.

"The sun was already a hand's breadth above the peaks, and a light wind blew that revived me. The trail was easy to follow,

clear and well-marked. It led over a hummock, and upon the other side of the hummock was an upland pool of very deep water. The trail led me to the high rocky bank of this pool and there was an end of it."

And there, too, is an end of the statement of Cifuentes.

Whether or no that mountain tarn holds the mortal remains of Don Q. must remain for ever a mystery. It may be so. One thing only is certain. Never again did any see him in Spain. So many think him dead. But others say that far away in Mexico a grim old monk is making atonement for the sins of his life, and that he rules his savage Indian converts with bitter rods. They tell, also, how night by night the white-washed shrine of San Pedro of Ometepec rings with the chanting of masses for the soul of one Robledo *el cazador,* who lies asleep in the little graveyard of that other chapel of San Pedro, far away among the cloudy Spanish hills.

THE END

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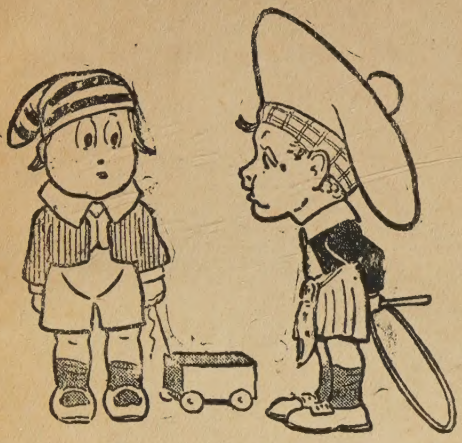

"You didnae tak' the Measles when a' the rest of the schuil had it?"

"Naw, no sic' luck! Ma mither made me wash masel' wi'

WRIGHT'S

COAL TAR SOAP

and that keepit the doctor awa'."

C·J·U

C·J·U